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LITERARY TASTE

BY ARNOLD BENNETT

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LITERARY TASTE

How to form it, with detailed instructions for collecting a complete library of English Literature

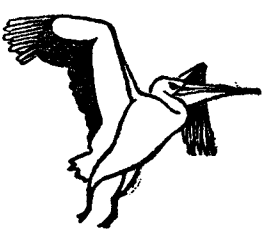
BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

Edited with additional Lists by

FRANK SWINNERTON

With a new chapter specially designed for this edition



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE first edition of *Literary Taste* was published in 1909, a year after *The Old Wives' Tale* had taken the town and made the author famous. It has been long out of print. In the interval its text has not appreciably staled—although a few 'dated' allusions have had to be changed;—but the lists of recommended books and editions have lost accuracy. I have revised them all.

Until I did this, I had not realized how greatly fashion in reading had altered in twenty-eight years. At the turn of the century nearly every publisher of note cheaply reprinted old and elderly books, from Chaucer to George Eliot. He had no royalties to pay on such books; production costs were low; and sales were continuous. For those who loved books this was a fortunate circumstance; and it was to potential book-lovers with small pockets that Arnold Bennett first directed his goodwill.

Prices ranged in his lists from sixpence to seven shillings and sixpence. Although he confined himself—as I have done—to *English* books only, the publishers did nothing of the kind. They offered Aristotle's *Poetics* for threepence, and the purchaser would find, to his delight, that the book contained also Longinus 'On the Sublime'. Lessing's *Laocoon* was also available at a shilling, as well as such rarities as Sadi's *Gulistan* or the *Volsunga Saga*. A complete Shakespeare for three-and-sixpence was as it should be; but less customary was a complete edition of Keats's Letters, edited by Buxton Forman, for two shillings. The Temple Classics were eighteenpence a book, and Everyman's Library was a shilling. It was thus not difficult for Arnold Bennett to recommend the purchase of an entire library for £26 14s. 7d.

Such days are gone. The devout self-education of late Victorians has given place to something easier and more accomplished, and the 'classics' have been selected to a

bare minimum. Only the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century are much studied. Instead of reading Spenser, Milton, Crabbe, and Wordsworth, we unravel our contemporaries. We buy new books to an extent unheard of a quarter of a century ago; but we do not buy, or base our knowledge of literature upon, the lesser authors of the past. This fact has had its effects upon the publishers' catalogues; with the result that authors chosen by Arnold Bennett at sixpence or a shilling a time have risen steeply in cost. Indeed, I have been glad to discover any edition at all of Campion or Drayton. Many of his favourite series, too, such as the Scott Library and the Canterbury Poets, are no longer in print. And a few of his favourite authors—for example, Herbert Spencer—have become almost laughing-stocks to those who have not read them. In Herbert Spencer's case, I surmise those who know anything about his *First Principles* are greatly outnumbered by those who know all about his Home Life.

However, I have left the original lists as nearly as possible what Arnold Bennett made them. They are good lists, and very characteristic and instructive. Two or three of his names unavoidably disappear —for Sir William Temple is *vieux jeu*, and so is Augusta Webster—and two or three which were unaccountably overlooked by the author have been inserted. I have not preferred my own judgment to his, but where a better book by the same author is now available, or where the recommended book is not to be had, I have made a slight change; and when the edition originally specified was no longer available I have chosen another. In the matter of editions I have followed Arnold Bennett's course in naming, as far as possible, the cheapest, unless I had reason to know that one at a very slightly higher price had greater value. And in this Penguin edition I am lucky to be able to show in an appendix (printed on pages 163-165) that many especially valuable titles, of which the

greater number are modern, are obtainable in the Penguin or Pelican series at sixpence apiece. That, for readers of restricted means, is really notable news. Some of the books are those already included in more expensive editions in the major lists; others may safely be regarded as admirable alternatives and read in place of the original recommendations.

Bennett's lists ended with George Gissing, who had died in 1903. They did not include Meredith, Hardy, Henry James, or Swinburne, because all these men were alive at the time, and because it was no part of his plan to include living writers. We think differently nowadays, and I have therefore departed from the principle of Dead Men Only. All sorts of live men appear in the last lists (for which I alone am responsible); and although of these live men only the poets are very young I hope that I shall escape severe censure for my inclusions and omissions.

One or two of these have been made at the instance of a friend who read the

proofs, whom I do not name lest he should be blamed undeservedly. He has wrestled with me for not removing the commendation of *Aurora Leigh* and for allowing Malthus, who was in Arnold Bennett's original lists, to stay. But this is Arnold Bennett's book, and it must continue to be largely as he wished it, warts and all.

To conclude. There is a common parrot cry nowadays by which stupid persons try to demonstrate their fine taste. They say they care only for 'the first class'. They know nothing about the first class; they are merely repeating what they have been taught. But it was Arnold Bennett's wish to encourage catholic taste, not exclusive taste. In pursuance of that wish he wrote this book; and any man who will take the trouble to read what is here recommended will learn a great deal. One of the things he will learn is that quality is of more importance than class. It is a lesson not to be despised.

FRANK SWINNERTON

CHAPTER I

THE AIM

At the beginning a misconception must be removed from the path. Many people, if not most, look on literary taste as an elegant accomplishment, by acquiring which they will complete themselves, and make themselves finally fit as members of a correct society. They are secretly ashamed of their ignorance of literature, in the same way as they would be ashamed of their ignorance of etiquette at a high entertainment, or of their inability to ride a horse if suddenly called upon to do so. There are certain things that a man ought to know, or to know about, and literature is one of them: such is their idea. They have learnt to dress themselves with propriety, and to behave with propriety on all occasions; they are fairly 'up' in the

questions of the day; by industry and enterprise they are succeeding in their vocations; it behoves them, then, not to forget that an acquaintance with literature is an indispensable part of a self-respecting man's personal baggage. Painting doesn't matter; music doesn't matter very much. But 'everyone is supposed to know' about literature. Then, literature is such a charming distraction! Literary taste thus serves two purposes: as a certificate of correct culture and as a private pastime. A young professor of mathematics, immense at mathematics and games, dangerous at chess, capable of Haydn on the violin, once said to me, after listening to some chat on books, 'Yes, I must take up literature'. As though saying: 'I was rather forgetting literature. However, I've polished off all these other things. I'll have a shy at literature now.'

This attitude, or any attitude which resembles it, is wrong. To him who really

comprehends what literature is, and what the function of literature is, this attitude is simply ludicrous. It is also fatal to the formation of literary taste. People who regard literary taste simply as an accomplishment, and literature simply as a distraction, will never truly succeed either in acquiring the accomplishment or in using it half-acquired as a distraction; though the one is the most perfect of distractions, and though the other is unsurpassed by any other accomplishment in elegance or in power to impress the universal snobbery of civilised mankind. Literature, instead of being an accessory, is the fundamental *sine qua non* of complete living. I am extremely anxious to avoid rhetorical exaggerations. I do not think I am guilty of one in asserting that he who has not been 'presented to the freedom' of literature has not wakened up out of his prenatal sleep. He is merely not born. He can't see; he can't hear; he can't feel, in any full sense. He can only eat his dinner. What more

than anything else annoys people who know the true function of literature, and have profited thereby, is the spectacle of so many thousands of individuals going about under the delusion that they are alive, when, as a fact, they are no nearer being alive than a bear in winter.

I will tell you what literature is! No—I only wish I could. But I can't. No one can. Gleams can be thrown on the secret, inklings given, but no more. I will try to give you an inkling. And, to do so, I will take you back into your own history, or forward into it. That evening when you went for a walk with your faithful friend, the friend from whom you hid nothing—or almost nothing . . . ! You were, in truth, somewhat inclined to hide from him the particular matter which monopolized your mind that evening, but somehow you contrived to get on to it, drawn by an overpowering fascination. And as your faithful friend was sympathetic and discreet, and flattered you by a respectful curiosity, you

proceeded further and further into the said matter, growing more and more confidential, until at last you cried out, in a terrific whisper: 'My boy, she is simply miraculous!' At that moment you were in the domain of literature.

Let me explain. Of course, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, she was not miraculous. Your faithful friend had never noticed that she was miraculous, nor had about forty thousand other fairly keen observers. She was just a girl. Troy had not been burnt for her. A girl cannot be called a miracle. If a girl is to be called a miracle, then you might call pretty nearly anything a miracle . . . That is just it: you might. You can. You ought. Amid all the miracles of the universe you had just wakened up to one. You were full of your discovery. You were under a divine impulsion to impart that discovery. You had a strong sense of the marvellous beauty of something, and you had to share it. You

were in a passion about something, and you had to vent yourself on somebody. You were drawn towards the whole of the rest of the human race. Mark the effect of your mood and utterance on your faithful friend. He knew that she was not a miracle. No other person could have made him believe that she was a miracle. But you, by the force and sincerity of your own vision of her, and by the fervour of your desire to make him participate in your vision, did for quite a long time cause him to feel that he had been blind to the miracle of that girl.

You were producing literature. You were alive. Your eyes were unlidded, your ears were unstopped, to some part of the beauty and the strangeness of the world; and a strong instinct within you forced you to tell someone. It was not enough for you that you saw and heard. Others had to see and hear. Others had to be wakened up. And they were! It is

quite possible—I am not quite sure—that your faithful friend the very next day, or the next month, looked at some other girl, and suddenly saw that she, too, was miraculous! The influence of literature!

The makers of literature are those who have seen and felt the miraculous interestingness of the universe. And the greatest makers of literature are those whose vision has been the widest, and whose feeling been the most intense. Your own fragment of insight was accidental, and perhaps temporary. *Their* lives are one long ecstasy of denying that the world is a dull place. Is it nothing to you to learn to understand that the world is not a dull place? Is it nothing to you to be led out of the tunnel on to the hillside, to have all your senses quickened, to be invigorated by the true savour of life, to feel your heart beating under that correct necktie of yours? These makers of literature render you their equals.

The aim of literary study is not to amuse the hours of leisure; it is to awake oneself, it is to be alive, to intensify one's capacity for pleasure, for sympathy, and for comprehension. It is not to affect one hour, but twenty-four hours. It is to change utterly one's relations with the world. An understanding appreciation of literature means an understanding appreciation of the world, and it means nothing else. Not isolated and unconnected parts of life, but all of life, brought together and correlated in a synthetic map! The spirit of literature is unifying; it joins the candle and the star, and by the magic of an image shows that the beauty of the greater is in the less. And, not content with the disclosure of beauty and the bringing together of all things whatever within its focus, it enforces a moral wisdom by the tracing everywhere of cause and effect. It consoles doubly—by the revelation of unsuspected loveliness, and by the proof that our lot is the common lot. It

is the supreme cry of the discoverer, offering sympathy and asking for it in a single gesture. In attending a University Extension Lecture on the sources of Shakespeare's plots or in studying the researches of George Saintsbury into the origins of English prosody, or in weighing the evidence for and against the assertion that Rousseau was a scoundrel, one is apt to forget what literature really is and is for. It is well to remind ourselves that literature is first and last a means of life, and that the enterprise of forming one's literary taste is an enterprise of learning how best to use this means of life. People who don't want to live, people who would sooner hibernate than feel intensely, will be wise to eschew literature. They had better, to quote from the finest passage in a fine poem, 'sit around and eat blackberries'. The sight of a 'common bush afire with God' might upset their nerves.

CHAPTER II

YOUR PARTICULAR CASE

THE attitude of the average decent person towards the classics of his own tongue is one of distrust—I had almost said, of fear. I will not take the case of Shakespeare, for Shakespeare is 'taught' in schools; that is to say, all authorities pedagogic bind themselves together in a determined effort to make every boy in the land a lifelong enemy of Shakespeare. (It is a mercy they don't 'teach' Blake.) I will take, for an example, Sir Thomas Browne, as to whom the average person has no offensive juvenile memories. He is bound to have read somewhere that the style of Sir Thomas Browne is unsurpassed by anything in English literature. One day he sees the *Religio Medici* in a shop-window (or, rather, outside a shop-window, for he

would hesitate about entering a book-shop) and he buys it, by way of a mild experiment. He does not expect to be enchanted by it; a profound instinct tells him that Sir Thomas Browne is 'not in his line'; and in the result he is even less enchanted than he expected to be. He reads the introduction, and he glances at the first page or two of the work. He sees nothing but words. The work makes no appeal to him whatever. He is surrounded by trees, and cannot perceive the forest. He puts the book away. If Sir Thomas Browne is mentioned, he will say, 'Yes, very fine!' with a feeling of pride that he has at any rate bought and inspected Sir Thomas Browne. Deep in his heart is a suspicion that people who get enthusiastic about Sir Thomas Browne are vain and conceited *poseurs*. After a year or so, when he has recovered from the discouragement caused by Sir Thomas Browne, he may, if he is young and hopeful, repeat the experiment with Congreve or Addison. Same

sequel! And so on for perhaps a decade, until his commerce with the classics finally expires! That, magazines and newish fiction apart, is the literary history of the average decent person.

And even your case, though you are genuinely preoccupied with thoughts of literature, bears certain disturbing resemblances to the drab case of the average person. You do not approach the classics with gusto—anyhow, not with the same gusto as you would approach a new novel by a modern author who had taken your fancy. You never murmured to yourself, when reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in bed: 'Well, I really must read one more chapter before I go to sleep!' Speaking generally, the classics do not afford you a pleasure commensurate with their renown. You peruse them with a sense of duty, a sense of doing the right thing, a sense of 'improving yourself', rather than with a sense of gladness. You do not smack your

lips; you say: 'That is good for me.' You make little plans for reading, and then you invent excuses for breaking the plans. Something new, something which is not a classic, will surely draw you away from a classic. It is all very well for you to pretend to agree with the verdict of the elect that *Clarissa Harlowe* is one of the greatest novels in the world—a new Wodehouse, or even a new number of a magazine, will cause you to neglect *Clarissa Harlowe*, just as though Wodehouse, etc., could not be kept for a few days without turning sour! So that you have to ordain rules for yourself, as: 'I will not read anything else until I have read Richardson, or Gibbon, for an hour each day.' Thus proving that you regard a classic as a pill, the swallowing of which merits jam! And the more modern a classic is, the more it resembles the stuff of the year and the less it resembles the classics of the centuries, the more easy and enticing do you find that classic. Hence you are glad that

George Eliot, the Brontës, Thackeray, are considered as classics, because you really *do* enjoy them. Your sentiments concerning them approach your sentiments concerning a 'rattling good story' in a magazine.

I may have exaggerated—or, on the other hand, I may have understated—the unsatisfactory characteristics of your particular case, but it is probable that in the mirror I hold up you recognize the rough outlines of your likeness. You do not care to admit it; but it is so. You are not content with yourself. The desire to be more truly literary persists in you. You feel that there is something wrong in you, but you cannot put your finger on the spot. Further, you feel that you are a bit of a sham. Something within you continually forces you to exhibit for the classics an enthusiasm which you do not sincerely feel. You even try to persuade yourself that you are enjoying a book, when the next moment you drop it in the middle and

forget to resume it. You occasionally buy classical works, and do not read them at all; you practically decide that it is enough to possess them, and that the mere possession of them gives you a *cachet*. The truth is, you are a sham. And your soul is a sea of uneasy remorse. You reflect: 'According to what Matthew Arnold says, I ought to be perfectly mad about Wordsworth's *Prelude*. And I am not. Why am I not? Have I got to be learned, to undertake a vast course of study, in order to be perfectly mad about Wordsworth's *Prelude?* Or am I born without the faculty of pure taste in literature, despite my vague longings? I do wish I could smack my lips over Wordsworth's *Prelude* as I did over that splendid story by L. A. G. Strong, *The White Cottage*, in the *Grand Magazine!*' . . . Yes, I am convinced that in your dissatisfied, your diviner moments, you address yourself in these terms. I am convinced that I have diagnosed your symptoms.

Now the enterprise of forming one's literary taste is an agreeable one; if it is not agreeable it cannot succeed. But this does not imply that it is an easy or a brief one. The enterprise of beating Colonel Bogey at golf is an agreeable one, but it means honest and regular work. A fact to be borne in mind always! You are certainly not going to realize your ambition—and so great, so influential an ambition!—by spasmodic and half-hearted effort. You must begin by making up your mind adequately. You must rise to the height of the affair. You must approach a grand undertaking in the grand manner. You ought to mark the day in the calendar as a solemnity. Human nature is weak, and has need of tricky aids, even in the pursuit of happiness. Time will be necessary to you, and time regularly and sacredly set apart. Many people affirm that they cannot be regular, that regularity numbs them. I think this is true of a very few people, and that in the rest the objection

to regularity is merely an attempt to excuse idleness. I am inclined to think that you personally are capable of regularity. And I am sure that if you firmly and constantly devote certain specific hours on certain specific days of the week to this business of forming your literary taste, you will arrive at the goal much sooner. The simple act of resolution will help you. This is the first preliminary.

The second preliminary is to surround yourself with books, to create for yourself a bookish atmosphere. The merely physical side of books is important—more important than it may seem to the inexperienced. Theoretically (save for works of reference), a student has need for but one book at a time. Theoretically, an amateur of literature might develop his taste by expending sixpence a week, or a penny a day, in one sixpenny edition of a classic after another sixpenny edition of a classic, and he might store his library in a hat-box or a biscuit-tin. But in practice

he would have to be a monster of resolution to succeed in such conditions. The eye must be flattered; the hand must be flattered; the sense of owning must be flattered. Sacrifices must be made for the acquisition of literature. That which has cost a sacrifice is always endeared. A detailed scheme of buying books will come later, in the light of further knowledge. For the present, buy—buy whatever has received the *imprimatur* of critical authority. Buy without any immediate reference to what you read. Buy! Surround yourself with volumes, as handsome as you can afford. And for reading, all that I will now particularly enjoin is a general and inclusive tasting, in order to attain a sort of familiarity with the look of 'literature in all its branches'. A turning over of the pages of a volume of Chambers's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, the third for preference, may be suggested as an admirable and a diverting exercise. You might mark the authors that flash an appeal to you.

CHAPTER III

WHY A CLASSIC IS A CLASSIC

THE large majority of our fellow-citizens care as much about literature as they care about archaeology or the programme of the Legislature. They do not ignore it; they are not quite indifferent to it. But their interest in it is faint and perfunctory; or, if their interest happens to be violent, it is spasmodic. Ask the two hundred thousand persons whose enthusiasm made the vogue of a popular novel ten years ago what they think of that novel now, and you will gather that they have utterly forgotten it, and that they would no more dream of reading it again than of reading Bishop Stubbs's *Select Charters*. Probably if they did read it again they would not enjoy it—not because the said novel is a whit worse now than it was ten years ago;

not because their taste has improved—but because they have not had sufficient practice to be able to rely on their taste as a means of permanent pleasure. They simply don't know from one day to the next what will please them.

In the face of this one may ask: Why does the great and universal fame of classical authors continue? The answer is that the fame of classical authors is entirely independent of the majority. Do you suppose that if the fame of Shakespeare depended on the man in the str[illegible] it would survive a fortnight? The fa[illegible] of classical authors is originally made, [illegible] it is maintained, by a passionate few. Even when a first class author has enjoyed immense success during his lifetime, the majority have never appreciated him as sincerely as they have appreciated second-rate men. He has always been reinforced by the ardour of the passionate few. And in the case of an author who has emerged

into glory after his death the happy sequel has been due solely to the obstinate perseverance of the few. They could not leave him alone; they would not. They kept on savouring him, and talking about him, and buying him, and they generally behaved with such eager zeal, and they were so authoritative and sure of themselves, that at last the majority grew accustomed to the sound of his name and placidly agreed to the proposition that he was a genius; the majority really did not care very much either way.

And it is by the passionate few that the renown of genius is kept alive from one generation to another. These few are always at work. They are always rediscovering genius. Their curiosity and enthusiasm are exhaustless, so that there is little chance of genius being ignored. And, moreover, they are always working either for or against the verdicts of the majority. The majority can make a reputa-

tion, but it is too careless to maintain it. If, by accident, the passionate few agree with the majority in a particular instance, they will frequently remind the majority that such and such a reputation has been made, and the majority will idly concur: 'Ah, yes. By the way, we must not forget that such and such a reputation exists.' Without that persistent memory-jogging the reputation would quickly fall into the oblivion which is death. The passionate few only have their way by reason of the fact that they are genuinely interested in literature, that literature matters to them. They conquer by their obstinacy alone, by their eternal repetition of the same statements. Do you suppose they could prove to the man in the street that Shakespeare was a great artist? The said man would not even understand the terms they employed. But when he is told ten thousand times, and generation after generation, that Shakespeare was a great artist, the said man believes—not by reason,

but by faith. And he too repeats that Shakespeare was a great artist, and he buys the complete works of Shakespeare and puts them on his shelves, and he goes to see the marvellous stage-effects which accompany *King Lear* or *Hamlet*, and comes back religiously convinced that Shakespeare was a great artist. All because the passionate few could not keep their admiration of Shakespeare to themselves. This is not cynicism; but truth. And it is important that those who wish to form their literary taste should grasp it.

What causes the passionate few to make such a fuss about literature? There can be only one reply. They find a keen and lasting pleasure in literature. They enjoy literature as some men enjoy beer. The recurrence of this pleasure naturally keeps their interest in literature very much alive. They are for ever making new researches, for ever practising on themselves. They learn to understand themselves. They learn to know what they want. Their taste

becomes surer and surer as their experience lengthens. They do not enjoy to-day what will seem tedious to them to-morrow. When they find a book tedious, no amount of popular clatter will persuade them that it is pleasurable; and when they find it pleasurable no chill silence of the street-crowds will affect their conviction that the book is good and permanent. They have faith in themselves. ' What are the qualities in a book which give keen and lasting pleasure to the passionate few? This is a question so difficult that it has never yet been completely answered. You may talk lightly about truth, insight, knowledge, wisdom, humour, and beauty. But these comfortable words do not really carry you very far, for each of them has to be defined, especially the first and last. It is all very well for Keats in his airy manner to assert that beauty is truth, truth beauty, and that that is all he knows or needs to know. I, for one, need to know a lot more. And I never shall

know. Nobody, not even Hazlitt nor Sainte-Beuve, has ever finally explained why he thought a book beautiful. I take the first fine lines that come to hand—

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy—

and I say that those lines are beautiful, because they give me pleasure. But why? No answer! I only know that the passionate few will, broadly, agree with me in deriving this mysterious pleasure from those lines. I am only convinced that the liveliness of our pleasure in those and many other lines by the same author will ultimately cause the majority to believe, by faith, that W. B. Yeats is a genius. The one reassuring aspect of the literary affair is that the passionate few are passionate about the same things. A continuance of interest does, in actual practice, lead ultimately to the same judgments. There is only the difference in width of interest.

Some of the passionate few lack catholicity, or, rather, the whole of their interest is confined to one narrow channel; they have none left over. These men help specially to vitalize the reputations of the narrower geniuses: such as Crashaw. But their active predilections never contradict the general verdict of the passionate few; rather they reinforce it.

A classic is a work which gives pleasure to the minority which is intensely and permanently interested in literature. It lives on because the minority, eager to renew the sensation of pleasure, is eternally curious and is therefore engaged in an eternal process of rediscovery. A classic does not survive for any ethical reason. It does not survive because it conforms to certain canons, or because neglect would not kill it. It survives because it is a source of pleasure, and because the passionate few can no more neglect it than a bee can neglect a flower. The passionate few do

not read 'the right things' because they are right. That is to put the cart before the horse. 'The right things' are the right things solely because the passionate few *like* reading them. Hence—and I now arrive at my point—the one primary essential to literary taste is a hot interest in literature. If you have that, all the rest will come. It matters nothing that at present you fail to find pleasure in certain classics. The driving impulse of your interest will force you to acquire experience, and experience will teach you the use of the means of pleasure. You do not know the secret ways of yourself: that is all. A continuance of interest must inevitably bring you to the keenest joys. But, of course, experience may be acquired judiciously or injudiciously, just as Putney may be reached via Walham Green or via Moscow.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE TO BEGIN

I WISH particularly that my readers should not be intimidated by the apparent vastness and complexity of this enterprise of forming the literary taste. It is not so vast nor so complex as it looks. There is no need whatever for the inexperienced enthusiast to confuse and frighten himself with thoughts of 'literature in all its branches'. Experts and pedagogues (chiefly pedagogues) have, for the purpose of convenience split literature up into divisions and sub-divisions—such as prose and poetry; or imaginative, philosophic, historical; or elegiac, heroic, lyric; or religious and profane, etc., *ad infinitum*. But the greater truth is that literature is all one—and indivisible. The idea of the unity of literature should be well planted and

fostered in the head. All literature is the expression of feeling, of passion, of emotion, caused by a sensation of the interestingness of life. What drives an historian to write history? Nothing but the overwhelming impression made upon him by the survey of past times. He is forced into an attempt to reconstitute the picture for others. If hitherto you have failed to perceive that an historian is a being in strong emotion, trying to convey his emotion to others, read the passage in the *Memoirs* of Gibbon, in which he describes how he finished the *Decline and Fall.* You will probably never again look upon the *Decline and Fall* as a 'dry' work.

What applies to history applies to the other 'dry' branches. Even Johnson's Dictionary is packed with emotion. Read the last paragraph of the preface to it: 'In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed . . . It

may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. . . .' And so on to the close: 'I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wish to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.' Yes, tranquillity; but not frigid! The whole passage, one of the finest in English prose, is marked by the heat of emotion. You may discover the same quality in such books as Spencer's *First Principles*. You may discover it everywhere in literature, from the cold fire of Pope's irony to the blasting temperatures of Swinburne. Literature does not begin till emotion has begun.

There is even no essential, definable difference between those two great

branches, prose and poetry. For prose may have rhythm. All that can be said is that verse will scan, while prose will not. The difference is purely formal. Very few poets have succeeded in being so poetical as Isaiah, Sir Thomas Browne, and Ruskin have been in prose. It can only be stated that, as a rule, writers have shown an instinctive tendency to choose verse for the expression of the very highest emotion. The supreme literature is in verse, but the finest achievements in prose approach so nearly to the finest achievements in verse that it is ill work deciding between them. In the sense in which poetry is best understood, all literature is poetry—or is, at any rate, poetical in quality. Macaulay's ill-informed and unjust denunciations live because his genuine emotion made them into poetry, while his *Lays of Ancient Rome* are dead because they are not the expression of a genuine emotion. As the literary taste develops, this quality of emotion, restrained

or loosed, will be more and more widely perceived at large in literature. It is the quality that must be looked for. It is the quality that unifies literature (and all the arts).

It is not merely useless, it is harmful, for you to map out literature into divisions and branches, with different laws, rules, or canons. The first thing is to obtain some possession of literature. When you have actually felt some of the emotion which great writers have striven to impart to you, and when your emotions become so numerous and puzzling that you feel the need of arranging them and calling them by names, then—and not before—you can begin to study what has been attempted in the way of classifying and ticketing literature. Manuals and treatises are excellent things in their kind, but they are simply dead weight at the start. You can only acquire really useful general ideas by first acquiring particular ideas, and putting

those particular ideas together. You cannot make bricks without straw. Do not worry about literature in the abstract, about theories as to literature. Get at it. Get hold of literature in the concrete as a dog gets hold of a bone. If you ask me where you ought to begin, I shall gaze at you as I might gaze at the faithful animal if he inquired which end of the bone he ought to attack. It doesn't matter in the slightest degree where you begin. Begin wherever the fancy takes you to begin. Literature is a whole.

There is only one restriction for you. You must begin with an acknowledged classic; you must eschew modern works. The reason for this does not imply any depreciation of the present age at the expense of last ages. Indeed, it is important, if you wish ultimately to have a wide, catholic taste, to guard against the too common assumption that nothing modern will stand comparison with the classics.

In every age there have been people to sigh: 'Ah, yes. Fifty years ago we had a few great writers. But they are all dead, and no young ones are arising to take their place.' This attitude of mind is deplorable, if not silly, and is a certain proof of narrow taste. It is a surety that in 1959 gloomy and egregious persons will be saying: 'Ah, yes. At the beginning of the century there were great poets like Swinburne, Meredith, Francis Thompson, and Yeats. Great novelists like Hardy and Conrad. Great historians like Stubbs and Maitland, etc. etc. But they are all dead now, and whom have we to take their place?' It is not until an age has receded into history, and all its mediocrity has dropped away from it, that we can see it as it is—as a group of men of genius. We forget the immense amount of twaddle that the great epochs produced. The total amount of fine literature created in a given period of time differs from epoch to epoch, but it does not differ much. And we may

be perfectly sure that our own age will make a favourable impression upon that excellent judge, posterity. Therefore, beware of disparaging the present in your own mind. While temporarily ignoring it, dwell upon the idea that its chaff contains about as much wheat as any similar quantity of chaff has contained wheat.

The reason why you must avoid modern works at the beginning is simply that you are not in a position to choose among modern works. Nobody at all is quite in a position to choose with certainty among modern works. To sift the wheat from the chaff is a process that takes an exceedingly long time. Modern works have to pass before the bar of the taste of successive generations. Whereas, with classics, which have been through the ordeal, almost the reverse is the case. *Your taste has to pass before the bar of the classics.* That is the point. If you differ with a classic, it is you who are wrong, and not the book. If you

differ with a modern work, you may be wrong or you may be right, but no judge is authoritative enough to decide. Your taste is unformed. It needs guidance, and it needs authoritative guidance. Into the business of forming literary taste faith enters. You probably will not specially care for a particular classic at first. If you did care for it at first, your taste, so far as that classic is concerned, would be formed, and our hypothesis is that your taste is not formed. How are you to arrive at the stage of caring for it? Chiefly, of course, by examining it and honestly trying to understand it. But this process is materially helped by an act of faith, by the frame of mind which says: 'I know on the highest authority that this thing is fine, that it is capable of giving me pleasure. Hence I am determined to find pleasure in it.' Believe me that faith counts enormously in the development of that wide taste which is the instrument of wide pleasures. But it must be faith founded on unassailable authority.

CHAPTER V

HOW TO READ A CLASSIC

LET us begin experimental reading with Charles Lamb. I choose Lamb for various reasons: He is a great writer, wide in his appeal, of a highly sympathetic temperament; and his finest achievements are simple and very short. Moreover, he may usefully lead to other and more complex matters, as will appear later. Now, your natural tendency will be to think of Charles Lamb as a book, because he has arrived at the stage of being a classic. Charles Lamb was a man, not a book. It is extremely important that the beginner in literary study should always form an idea of the man behind the book. The book is nothing but the expression of the man. The book is nothing but the man trying to talk to you, trying to impart to you some of his

feelings. An experienced student will divine the man from the book, will understand the man by the book, as is, of course, logically proper. But the beginner will do well to aid himself in understanding the book by means of independent information about the man. He will thus at once relate the book to something human, and strengthen in his mind the essential notion of the connection between literature and life. The earliest literature was delivered orally direct by the artist to the recipient. In some respects this arrangement was ideal. Changes in the constitution of society have rendered it impossible. Nevertheless, we can still, by the exercise of the imagination, hear mentally the accents of the artist speaking to us. We must so exercise our imagination as to feel the man behind the book.

Some biographical information about Lamb should be acquired. There are excellent short biographies of him by Canon

Ainger in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, in Chambers's *Encyclopaedia*, and in Chambers's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*. If you have none of these (but you ought to have the last), there are Mr. E. V. Lucas's exhaustive *Life* (Methuen, 21s.) and, cheaper, Mr. Charles Williams's *Lamb* (Duckworth, 2s.); also introductory studies prefixed to various editions of Lamb's works. Indeed, the facilities for collecting materials for a picture of Charles Lamb as a human being are prodigious. When you have made for yourself such a picture, read the *Essays of Elia* by the light of it. I will choose one of the most celebrated, *Dream Children: A Reverie*. At this point, kindly put my book down, and read *Dream Children*. Do not say to yourself that you will read it later, but read it now. When you have read it, you may proceed to my next paragraph.

You are to consider *Dream Children* as a human document. Lamb was nearing fifty

when he wrote it. You can see, especially from the last line, that the death of his elder brother, John Lamb, was fresh and heavy on his mind. You will recollect that in youth he had had a disappointing love-affair with a girl named Ann Simmons, who afterwards married a man named Bartrum. You will know that one of the influences of his childhood was his grandmother Field, housekeeper of Blakesware House, in Hertfordshire, at which mansion he sometimes spent his holidays. You will know that he was a bachelor, living with his sister Mary, who was subject to homicidal mania. And you will see in this essay, primarily, a supreme expression of the increasing loneliness of his life. He constructed all that preliminary tableau of paternal pleasure in order to bring home to you in the most poignant way his feeling of the solitude of his existence, his sense of all that he had missed and lost in the world. The key of the essay is one of profound sadness. But note that he makes his

sadness beautiful; or, rather, he shows the beauty that resides in sadness. You watch him sitting there in his 'bachelor armchair', and you say to yourself: 'Yes, it was sad, but it was somehow beautiful.' When you have said that to yourself, Charles Lamb, so far as you are concerned, has accomplished his chief aim in writing the essay. How exactly he produces his effect can never be fully explained. But one reason of his success is certainly his regard for truth. He does not falsely idealize his brother, nor the relations between them. He does not say, as a sentimentalist would have said, 'Not the slightest cloud ever darkened our relations'; nor does he exaggerate his solitude. Being a sane man, he has too much common sense to assemble all his woes at once. He might have told you that Bridget was a homicidal maniac; what he does tell you is that she was faithful. Another reason of his success is his continual regard for beautiful things and fine actions, as illustrated in the major

characteristics of his grandmother and his brother, and in the detailed description of Blakesware House and the gardens thereof.

Then, subordinate to the main purpose, part of the machinery of the main purpose, is the picture of the children—real children until the moment when they fade away. The traits of childhood are accurately and humorously put in again and again: 'Here John smiled, as much as to say, "That would be foolish indeed".' 'Here little Alice spread her hands.' 'Here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted.' 'Here John expanded all his eyebrows, and tried to look courageous.' 'Here John slily deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes.' 'Here the children fell a-crying . . . and prayed me to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother.' And the exquisite: 'Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be upbraiding.' Incidentally,

while preparing his ultimate solemn effect, Lamb has inspired you with a new, intensified vision of the wistful beauty of children —their imitativeness, their facile and generous emotions, their anxiety to be correct, their ingenuous haste to escape from grief into joy. You can see these children almost as clearly and as tenderly as Lamb saw them. For days afterwards you will not be able to look upon a child without recalling Lamb's portrayal of the grace of childhood. He will have shared with you his perception of beauty. If you possess children, he will have renewed for you the charm which custom does very decidedly stale. It is further to be noticed that the measure of his success in picturing the children is the measure of his success in his main effect. The more real they seem, the more touching is the revelation of the fact that they do not exist, and never have existed. And if you were moved by the reference to their 'pretty dead mother', you will be still more moved when you

learn that the girl who would have been their mother is not dead and is not Lamb's.

As, having read the essay, you reflect upon it, you will see how its emotional power over you has sprung from the sincere and unexaggerated expression of actual emotions exactly remembered by someone who had an eye always open for beauty, who was, indeed, obsessed by beauty. The beauty of old houses and gardens and aged virtuous characters, the beauty of children, the beauty of companionships, the softening beauty of dreams in an arm-chair—all these are brought together and mingled with the grief and regret which were the origin of the mood. Why is *Dream Children* a classic? It is a classic because it transmits to you, as to generations before you, distinguished emotion, because it makes you respond to the throb of life more intensely, more justly, and more nobly. And it is capable of doing this because Charles Lamb had a very distinguished, a very sensitive, and a

very honest mind. His emotions were noble. He felt so keenly that he was obliged to find relief in imparting his emotions. And his mental processes were so sincere that he could neither exaggerate nor diminish the truth. If he had lacked any one of these three qualities, his appeal would have been narrowed and weakened, and he would not have become a classic. Either his feelings would have been deficient in supreme beauty, and therefore less worthy to be imparted, or he would not have had sufficient force to impart them; or his honesty would not have been equal to the strain of imparting them accurately. In any case, he would not have set up in you that vibration which we call pleasure, and which is super-eminently caused by vitalizing participation in high emotion. As Lamb sat in his bachelor arm-chair, with his brother in the grave, and the faithful homicidal maniac by his side, he really did think to himself, 'This is beautiful. Sorrow is beautiful. Disappointment is beautiful.

Life is beautiful. *I must tell them.* I must make them understand.' Because he still makes you understand he is a classic. And now I seem to hear you say, 'But what about Lamb's famous literary style? Where does that come in?'

CHAPTER VI

THE QUESTION OF STYLE

In discussing the value of particular books, I have heard people say—people who were timid about expressing their views of literature in the presence of literary men: 'It may be bad from a literary point of view, but there are very good things in it.' Or: 'I dare say the style is very bad, but really the book is very interesting and suggestive.' Or: 'I'm not an expert, and so I never bother my head about good style. All I ask for is good matter. And when I have got it, critics may say what they like about the book.' And many other similar remarks, all showing that in the minds of the speakers there existed a notion that style is something supplementary to, and distinguishable from, matter; a sort of notion that a writer who wanted to be classical had first to find and

arrange his matter, and then dress it up elegantly in a costume of style, in order to please beings called literary critics.

This is a misapprehension. Style cannot be distinguished from matter. When a writer conceives an idea he conceives it in a form of words. That form of words constitutes his style, and it is absolutely governed by the idea. The idea can only exist in words, and it can only exist in one form of words. You cannot say exactly the same thing in two different ways. Slightly alter the expression, and you slightly alter the idea. Surely it is obvious that the expression cannot be altered without altering the thing expressed! A writer, having conceived and expressed an idea, may, and probably will, 'polish it up'. But what does he polish up? To say that he polishes up his style is merely to say that he is polishing up his idea, that he has discovered faults or imperfections in his idea, and is perfecting it. An idea exists in proportion as it is

expressed; it exists when it is expressed, and not before. It expresses itself. A clear idea is expressed clearly, and a vague idea vaguely. You need but take your own case and your own speech. For just as science is the development of common sense, so is literature the development of common daily speech. The difference between science and common sense is simply one of degree; similarly with speech and literature. Well, when you 'know what you think', you succeed in saying what you think, in making yourself understood. When you 'don't know what to think', your expressive tongue halts. And note how in daily life the characteristics of your style follow your mood; how tender it is when you are tender, how violent when you are violent. You have said to yourself in moments of emotion: 'If only I could write . . .' etc. You were wrong. You ought to have said: 'If only I could *think*—on this high plane.' When you have thought clearly you have never had any difficulty in saying what you

thought, though you may occasionally have had some difficulty in keeping it to yourself. And when you cannot express yourself, depend upon it that you have nothing precise to express, and that what incommodes you is not the vain desire to express, but the vain desire to *think* more clearly. All this just to illustrate how style and matter are co-existent, and inseparable, and alike.

You cannot have good matter with bad style. Examine the point more closely. A man wishes to convey a fine idea to you. He employs a form of words. That form of words is his style. Having read, you say: 'Yes, this idea is fine.' The writer has therefore achieved his end. But in what imaginable circumstances can you say: 'Yes, this idea is fine, but the style is not fine'? The sole medium of communication between you and the author has been the form of words. The fine idea has reached you. How? In the words, by the words. Hence the fineness must be in

the words. You may say, superiorly: 'He has expressed himself clumsily, but I can *see* what he means.' By what light? By something in the words, in the style. That something is fine. Moreover, if the style is clumsy, are you sure that you can see what he means? You cannot be quite sure. And at any rate, you cannot see distinctly. The 'matter' is what actually reaches you, and it must necessarily be affected by the style.

Still further to comprehend what style is, let me ask you to think of a writer's style exactly as you would think of the gestures and manners of an acquaintance. You know the man whose demeanour is 'always calm', but whose passions are strong. How do you know that his passions are strong? Because he 'gives them away' by some small, but important, part of his demeanour, such as the twitching of a lip or the whitening of the knuckles caused by clenching the hand. In other words, his demeanour, fundamentally, is not calm.

You know the man who is always 'smoothly polite and agreeable', but who affects you unpleasantly. Why does he affect you unpleasantly? Because he is tedious, and therefore disagreeable, and because his politeness is not real politeness. You know the man who is awkward, shy, clumsy, but who, nevertheless, impresses you with a sense of dignity and force. Why? Because mingled with that awkwardness and so forth *is* dignity. You know the blunt, rough fellow whom you instinctively guess to be affectionate—because there is 'something in his tone' or 'something in his eyes'. In every instance the demeanour, while perhaps seeming to be contrary to the character, is really in accord with it. The demeanour never contradicts the character. It is one part of the character that contradicts another part of the character. For, after all, the blunt man *is* blunt, and the awkward man *is* awkward, and these characteristics are defects. The demeanour merely expresses them. The

two men would be better if, while conserving their good qualities, they had the superficial attributes of smoothness and agreeableness possessed by the gentleman who is unpleasant to you. And as regards this latter, it is not his superficial attributes which are unpleasant to you; but his other qualities. In the end the character is shown in the demeanour; and the demeanour is a consequence of the character and resembles the character. So with style and matter. You may argue that the blunt, rough man's demeanour is unfair to his tenderness. I do not think so. For his churlishness is really very trying and painful, even to the man's wife, though a moment's tenderness will make her and you forget it. The man really is churlish, and much more often than he is tender. His demeanour is merely just to his character. So, when a writer annoys you for ten pages and then enchants you for ten lines, you must not explode against his style. You must not say that his style

won't let his matter 'come out'. You must remember the churlish, tender man. The more you reflect, the more clearly you will see that faults and excellences of style are faults and excellences of matter itself.

One of the most striking illustrations of this neglected truth is Thomas Carlyle. How often has it been said that Carlyle's matter is marred by the harshness and the eccentricities of his style? But Carlyle's matter is harsh and eccentric to precisely the same degree as his style is harsh and eccentric. Carlyle was harsh and eccentric. His behaviour was frequently ridiculous, if it were not abominable. His judgments were often extremely bizarre. When you read one of Carlyle's fierce diatribes, you say to yourself: 'This is splendid. The man's enthusiasm for justice and truth is glorious.' But you also say: 'He is a little unjust and a little untruthful. He goes too far. He lashes too hard.' These things are not the style; they are the matter. And

when, as in his greatest moments, he is emotional and restrained at once, you say: 'This is the real Carlyle.' Kindly notice how perfect the style has become! No harshnesses or eccentricities now! And if that particular matter is the 'real' Carlyle, then that particular style is Carlyle's 'real' style. But when you say 'real' you would more properly say 'best'. 'This is the best Carlyle.' If Carlyle had always been at his best he would have counted among the supreme geniuses of the world. But he was a mixture. His style is the expression of the mixture. The faults are only in the style because they are in the matter.

You will find that, in classical literature, the style always follows the mood of the matter. Thus, Charles Lamb's essay on *Dream Children* begins quite simply, in a calm, narrative manner, enlivened by a certain quippishness concerning the children. The style is grave when great-grandmother Field is the subject, and when the author passes to a rather elaborate impres-

sion of the picturesque old mansion it becomes as it were consciously beautiful. This beauty is intensified in the description of the still more beautiful garden. But the real dividing point of the essay occurs when Lamb approaches his elder brother. He unmistakably marks the point with the phrase: '*Then, in somewhat a more heightened tone*, I told how,' etc. Henceforward the style increases in fervour and in solemnity until the culmination of the essay is reached: 'And while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech . . .' Throughout, the style is governed by the matter. 'Well', you say, 'of course it is. It couldn't be otherwise. If it were otherwise it would be ridiculous. A man who made love as though he were preaching a sermon, or a man who preached a sermon as though he

were teasing schoolboys, or a man who described a death as though he were describing a practical joke, must necessarily be either an ass or a lunatic.' Just so. You have put it in a nutshell. You have disposed of the problem of style so far as it can be disposed of.

But what do those people mean who say: 'I read such and such an author for the beauty of his style alone'? Personally, I do not clearly know what they mean (and I have never been able to get them to explain), unless they mean that they read for the beauty of sound alone. When you read a book there are only three things of which you may be conscious: (1) The significance of the words, which is inseparably bound up with the thought. (2) The look of the printed words on the page—I do not suppose that anybody reads any author for the visual beauty of the words on the page. (3) The sound of the words, either actually uttered or imagined by the brain to be uttered. Now

it is indubitable that words differ in beauty of sound. To my mind one of the most beautiful words in the English language is 'pavement'. Enunciate it, study its sound, and see what you think. It is also indubitable that certain combinations of words have a more beautiful sound than certain other combinations. Thus Tennyson held that the most beautiful line he ever wrote was:

The mellow ouzel fluting in the elm.

Perhaps, as sound, it was. Assuredly it makes a beautiful succession of sounds, and recalls the bird-sounds which it is intended to describe. But does it live in the memory as one of the rare great Tennysonian lines? It does not. It has charm, but the charm is merely curious or pretty. A whole poem composed of lines with no better recommendation than that line has would remain merely curious or pretty. It would not permanently interest. It would be as insipid as a pretty woman who had nothing behind her prettiness. It

would not live. One may remark in this connection how the merely verbal felicities of Tennyson have lost our esteem. Who will now proclaim the *Idylls of the King* as a masterpiece? Of the thousands of lines written by him which please the ear, only those survive of which the matter is charged with emotion. No! As regards the man who professes to read an author 'for his style alone', I am inclined to think either that he will soon get sick of that author, or that he is deceiving himself and means the author's general temperament—not the author's verbal style, but a peculiar quality which runs through all the matter written by the author. Just as one may like a man for something which is always coming out of him, which one cannot define, and which is of the very essence of the man.

In judging the style of an author, you must employ the same canons as you use in judging men. If you do this you will not be tempted to attach importance to trifles that are negligible. There can be

no lasting friendship without respect. If an author's style is such that you cannot *respect* it, then you may be sure that, despite any present pleasure which you may obtain from that author, there is something wrong with his matter, and that the pleasure will soon cloy. You must examine your sentiments towards an author. If, when you have read an author you are pleased, without being conscious of aught but his mellifluousness, just conceive what your feelings would be after spending a month's holiday with a merely mellifluous man. If an author's style has pleased you, but done nothing except make you giggle, then reflect upon the ultimate tediousness of the man who can do nothing but jest. On the other hand, if you are impressed by what an author has said to you, but are aware of verbal clumsinesses in his work, you need worry about his 'bad style' exactly as much and exactly as little as you would worry about the manners of a kind-hearted, keen-brained friend who was

dangerous to carpets with a tea-cup in his hand. The friend's antics in a drawing-room are somewhat regrettable, but you would not say of him that his manners were bad. Again, if an author's style dazzles you instantly and blinds you to everything except its brilliant self, ask your soul, before you begin to admire his matter, what would be your final opinion of a man who at the first meeting fired his personality into you like a broadside. Reflect that, as a rule, the people whom you have come to esteem communicated themselves to you gradually, that they did not begin the entertainment with fire-works. In short, look at literature as you would look at life, and you cannot fail to perceive that, essentially, the style is the man. Decidedly you will never assert that you care nothing for style, that your enjoyment of an author's matter is unaffected by his style. And you will never assert, either, that style alone suffices for you.

If you are undecided upon a question of style, whether leaning to the favourable or to the unfavourable, the most prudent course is to forget that literary style exists. For, indeed, as style is understood by most people who have not analysed their impressions under the influence of literature, there *is* no such thing as literary style. You cannot divide literature into two elements and say: This is matter and that style. Further, the significance and the worth of literature are to be comprehended and assessed in the same way as the significance and the worth of any other phenomenon: by the exercise of common sense. Common sense will tell you that nobody, not even a genius, can be simultaneously vulgar and distinguished, or beautiful and ugly, or precise and vague, or tender and harsh. And common sense will therefore tell you that to try to set up vital contradictions between matter and style is absurd. When there is a superficial contradiction, one of the two mutually-

contradicting qualities is of far less importance than the other. If you refer literature to the standards of life, common sense will at once decide which quality should count heaviest in your esteem. You will be in no danger of weighing a mere maladroitness of manner against a fine trait of character, or of letting a graceful deportment blind you to a fundamental vacuity. When in doubt, ignore style, and think of the matter as you would think of an individual.

CHAPTER VII

WRESTLING WITH AN AUTHOR

HAVING disposed, so far as is possible and necessary, of that formidable question of style, let us now return to Charles Lamb, whose essay on *Dream Children* was the originating cause of our inquiry into style. As we have made a beginning of Lamb, it will be well to make an end of him. In the preliminary stages of literary culture, nothing is more helpful, in the way of kindling an interest and keeping it well alight, than to specialize for a time on one author, and particularly on an author so frankly and curiously 'human' as Lamb is. I do not mean that you should imprison yourself with Lamb's complete works for three months, and read nothing else. I mean that you should regularly devote a proportion of your learned leisure to

the study of Lamb until you are acquainted with all that is important in his work and about his work. (You may buy the complete works in prose and verse of Charles and Mary Lamb, edited by Thomas Hutchison, and published by the Oxford University Press, in two volumes for seven shillings the pair!) There is no reason why you should not become a modest specialist in Lamb. He is the very man for you; neither voluminous, nor difficult, nor uncomfortably lofty; always either amusing or touching: and—most important — himself passionately addicted to literature. You cannot like Lamb without liking literature in general. And you cannot read Lamb without learning about literature in general; for books were his hobby, and he was a critic of the first rank. His letters are full of literariness. You will naturally read his letters; you should not only be infinitely diverted by them (there are no better epistles), but you should receive from them much light on the works.

It is a course of study that I am suggesting to you. It means a certain amount of sustained effort. It means slightly more resolution, more pertinacity, and more expenditure of brain-tissue than are required for reading a newspaper. It means, in fact, 'work'. Perhaps you did not bargain for work when you joined me. But I do not think that the literary taste can be satisfactorily formed unless one is prepared to put one's back into the affair. And I may prophesy to you, by way of encouragement, that, in addition to the advantages of familiarity with masterpieces, of increased literary knowledge, and of a wide introduction to the true bookish atmosphere and 'feel' of things, which you will derive from a comprehensive study of Charles Lamb, you will also be conscious of a moral advantage—the very important and very inspiring advantage of really 'knowing something about something'. You will have achieved a definite step; you will be proudly aware

that you have put yourself in a position to judge as an expert whatever you may hear or read in the future concerning Charles Lamb. This legitimate pride and sense of accomplishment will stimulate you to go on further; it will generate steam. I consider that this indirect moral advantage even outweighs, for the moment, the direct literary advantages.

Now, I shall not shut my eyes to a possible result of your diligent intercourse with Charles Lamb. It is possible that you may be disappointed with him. It is — shall I say? — almost probable that you will be disappointed with him, at any rate partially. You will have expected more joy in him than you have received. I have referred in a previous chapter to the feeling of disappointment which often comes from first contacts with the classics. The neophyte is apt to find them—I may as well out with the word—dull. You may have found Lamb less diverting, less

interesting, than you hoped. You may have had to whip yourself up again and again to the effort of reading him. In brief, Lamb has not, for you, justified his terrific reputation. If a classic is a classic because it gives *pleasure* to succeeding generations of the people who are most keenly interested in literature, and if Lamb frequently strikes you as dull, then evidently there is something wrong. The difficulty must be fairly fronted, and the fronting of it brings us to the very core of the business of actually forming the taste. If your taste were classical you would discover in Lamb a continual fascination; whereas what you in fact do discover in Lamb is a not unpleasant flatness, enlivened by a vague humour and an occasional pathos. You ought, according to theory, to be enthusiastic; but you are apathetic, or, at best, half-hearted. There is a gulf. How to cross it?

To cross it needs time and needs trouble. The following considerations may aid. In

the first place, we have to remember that, in coming into the society of the classics in general and of Charles Lamb in particular, we are coming into the society of a mental superior. What happens usually in such a case? We can judge by recalling what happens when we are in the society of a mental inferior. We say things of which he misses the import; we joke, and he does not smile; what makes him laugh loudly seems to us horseplay or childish; he is blind to beauties which ravish us; he is ecstatic over what strikes us as crude; and his profound truths are for us trite commonplaces. His perceptions are relatively coarse; our perceptions are relatively subtle. We try to make him understand, to make him see, and if he is aware of his inferiority we may have some success. But if he is not aware of his inferiority, we soon hold our tongues and leave him alone in his self-satisfaction, convinced that there is nothing to be done with him. Every one of us has been through this experience with

a mental inferior, for there is always a mental inferior handy, just as there is always a being more unhappy than we are. In approaching a classic, the true wisdom is to place ourselves in the position of the mental inferior, aware of mental inferiority, humbly stripping off all conceit, anxious to rise out of that inferiority. Recollect that we always regard as quite hopeless the mental inferior who does not suspect his own inferiority. Our attitude towards Lamb must be: 'Charles Lamb was a greater man than I am, cleverer, sharper, subtler, finer, intellectually more powerful and with keener eyes for beauty. I must brace myself to follow his lead.' Our attitude must resemble that of one who cocks his ear and listens with all his soul for a distant sound.

To catch the sound we really must listen. That is to say, we must read carefully, with our faculties on the watch. We must read slowly and perseveringly. A

classic has to be wooed and is worth the wooing. Further, we must disdain no assistance. I am not in favour of studying criticism of classics before the classics themselves. My notion is to study the work and the biography of a classical writer together, and then to read criticism afterwards. I think that in reprints of the classics the customary 'critical introduction' ought to be put at the end, and not at the beginning, of the book. The classic should be allowed to make its own impression, however faint, on the virginal mind of the reader. But afterwards let explanatory criticism be read as much as you please. Explanatory criticism is very useful; nearly as useful as pondering for oneself on what one has read! Explanatory criticism may throw one single gleam that lights up the entire subject.

My second consideration (in aid of crossing the gulf) touches the quality of the pleasure to be derived from a classic. It

is never a violent pleasure. It is subtle, and it will wax in intensity, but the idea of violence is foreign to it. The artistic pleasures of an uncultivated mind are generally violent. They proceed from exaggeration in treatment, from a lack of balance, from attaching too great an importance to one aspect (usually superficial), while quite ignoring another. They are gross, like the joy of Worcester sauce on the palate. Now, if there is one point common to all classics, it is the absence of exaggeration. The balanced sanity of a great mind makes impossible exaggeration, and, therefore, distortion. The beauty of a classic is not at all apt to knock you down. It will steal over you, rather. Many serious students are, I am convinced, discouraged in the early stages because they are expecting a wrong kind of pleasure. They have abandoned Worcester sauce, and they miss it. They miss the coarse *tang*. They must realize that indulgence in the *tang* means the sure and total loss of sensitiveness—

sensitiveness even to the *tang* itself. They cannot have crudeness and fineness together. They must choose, remembering that while crudeness kills pleasure, fineness ever intensifies it.

CHAPTER VIII

SYSTEM IN READING

You have now definitely set sail on the sea of literature. You are afloat, and your anchor is up. I think I have given adequate warning of the dangers and disappointments which await the unwary and the sanguine. The enterprise in which you are engaged is not facile, nor is it short. I think I have sufficiently predicted that you will have your hours of woe, during which you may be inclined to send to perdition all writers, together with the inventor of printing. But if you have become really friendly with Lamb; if you know Lamb, or even half of him; if you have formed an image of him in your mind, and can, as it were, hear him brilliantly stuttering while you read his essays or letters, then certainly you are in a fit

condition to proceed and you want to know in which direction you are to proceed. Yes, I have caught your terrified and protesting whisper: 'I hope to heaven he isn't going to prescribe a Course of English Literature, because I feel I shall never be able to do it!' I am not. If your object in life was to be a University Extension Lecturer in English literature, then I should prescribe something drastic and desolating. But as your object, so far as I am concerned, is simply to obtain the highest and most tonic form of artistic pleasure of which you are capable, I shall not prescribe any regular course. Nay, I shall venture to dissuade you from any regular course. No man, and assuredly no beginner, can possibly pursue an historical course of literature without wasting a lot of weary time in acquiring mere knowledge which will yield neither pleasure nor advantage. In the choice of reading the individual must count; caprice must count, for caprice is often the truest index to the individuality.

Stand defiantly on your own feet, and do not excuse yourself to yourself. You do not exist in order to honour literature by becoming an encyclopaedia of literature. Literature exists for your service. Wherever you happen to be, that, for you, is the centre of literature.

Still, for your own sake you must confine yourself for a long time to recognized classics, for reasons already explained. And though you should not follow a course, you must have a system or principle. Your native sagacity will tell you that caprice, left quite unfettered, will end by being quite ridiculous. The system which I recommend is embodied in this counsel: Let one thing lead to another. In the sea of literature every part communicates with every other part; there are no land-locked lakes. It was with an eye to this system that I originally recommended you to start with Lamb. Lamb, if you are his intimate, has already brought you

into relations with a number of other prominent writers with whom you can in turn be intimate, and who will be particularly useful to you. Among these are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt. You cannot know Lamb without knowing these men, and some of them are of the highest importance. From the circle of Lamb's own work you may go off at a tangent at various points, according to your inclination. If, for instance, you are drawn towards poetry, you cannot, in all English literature, make a better start than with Wordsworth. And Wordsworth will send you backwards to a comprehension of the poets against whose influence Wordsworth fought. When you have understood Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, and Wordsworth's defence of them, you will be in a position to judge poetry in general. If, again, your mind hankers after an earlier and more romantic literature, Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with*

Shakespere has already, in an enchanting fashion, piloted you into a vast gulf of 'the sea which is Shakspere'.

Again, in Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt you will discover essayists inferior only to Lamb himself, and critics perhaps not inferior. Hazlitt is unsurpassed as a critic. His judgments are convincing and his enthusiasm of the most catching nature. Having arrived at Hazlitt or Leigh Hunt, you can branch off once more at any one of ten thousand points into still wider circles. And thus you may continue up and down the centuries as far as you like, yea, even to Chaucer. If you chance to read Hazlitt on *Chaucer and Spenser*, you will probably put your hat on instantly and go out and buy these authors; such is his communicating fire! I need not particularize further. Commencing with Lamb, and allowing one thing to lead to another, you cannot fail to be more and more impressed by the peculiar suitability to your needs of the

Lamb entourage and the Lamb period. For Lamb lived in a time of universal re-birth in English literature. Wordsworth and Coleridge were re-creating poetry; Scott was re-creating the novel; Lamb was re-creating the human document; and Hazlitt, Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, and others were re-creating criticism. Sparks are flying all about the place, and it will be not less than a miracle if something combustible and indestructible in you does not take fire.

I have only one cautionary word to utter. You may be saying to yourself: 'So long as I stick to classics I cannot go wrong.' You can go wrong. You can, while reading naught but very fine stuff, commit the grave error of reading too much of one kind of stuff. Now there are two kinds, and only two kinds. These two kinds are not prose and poetry, nor are they divided the one from the other by any differences of form or of subject. They

are the inspiring kind and the informing kind. No other genuine division exists in literature. De Quincey first clearly stated it. His terms were the literature of 'power' and the literature of 'knowledge'. In nearly all great literature the two qualities are to be found in company, but one usually predominates over the other. An example of the exclusively inspiring kind is Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. I cannot recall any first class example of the purely informing kind. The nearest approach to it that I can name is Spencer's *First Principles*, which, however, is at least once highly inspiring. An example in which the inspiring quality predominates is *Ivanhoe;* and an example in which the informing quality predominates is Hazlitt's essays on Shakespeare's characters. You must avoid giving undue preference to the kind in which the inspiring quality predominates or to the kind in which the informing quality predominates. Too much of the one is enervating; too much of the other

is desiccating. If you stick exclusively to the one you may become a mere debauchee of the emotions; if you stick exclusively to the other you may cease to live in any full sense. I do not say that you should hold the balance exactly even between the two kinds. Your taste will come into the scale. What I say is that neither kind must be neglected.

Lamb is an instance of a great writer whom anybody can understand and whom a majority of those who interest themselves in literature can more or less appreciate. He makes no excessive demand either on the intellect or on the faculty of sympathetic emotion. On both sides of Lamb, however, there lie literatures more difficult, more recondite. The 'knowledge' side need not detain us here; it can be mastered by concentration and perseverance. But the 'power' side, which comprises the supreme productions of genius, demands special consideration. You may

have arrived at the point of keenly enjoying Lamb and yet be entirely unable to 'see anything in' such writings as *Kubla Khan* or Milton's *Comus;* and as for *Hamlet* you may see nothing in it but a sanguinary tale 'full of quotations'. Nevertheless it is the supreme productions which are capable of yielding the supreme pleasures, and which *will* yield the supreme pleasures when the pass-key to them has been acquired. This pass-key is a comprehension of the nature of poetry.

CHAPTER IX

VERSE

THERE is a word, a 'name of fear', which rouses terror in the heart of the vast educated majority of the English-speaking race. The most valiant will fly at the mere utterance of that word. The most broad-minded will put their backs up against it. The most rash will not dare to affront it. I myself have seen it empty buildings that had been full; and I know that it will scatter a crowd more quickly than a hose-pipe, hornets, or the rumour of plague. Even to murmur it is to incur solitude, probably disdain, and possibly starvation, as historical examples show. That word is 'poetry'.

The profound objection of the average man to poetry can scarcely be exaggerated.

And when I say the average man, I do not mean the 'average sensual man'—any man who gets on to the top of the omnibus; I mean the average lettered man, the average man who does care a little for books and enjoys reading, and knows the classics by name and the popular writers by having read them. I am convinced that not one man in ten who reads, reads poetry—at any rate, knowingly. I am convinced, further, that not one man in ten who goes so far as knowingly to *buy* poetry ever reads it. You will find everywhere men who read very widely in prose, but who will say quite callously: 'No, I never read poetry.' If the sales of modern poetry, distinctly labelled as such, were to cease entirely to-morrow not a publisher would fail; scarcely a publisher would be affected; and not a poet would die—for I do not believe that a single modern English poet is living to-day on the current proceeds of his verse. For a country which possesses the greatest poetical literature in the world this condition

of affairs is at least odd. What makes it odder is that, occasionally, very occasionally, the average lettered man will have a fit of idolatry for a fine poet, buying his books in tens of thousands, and bestowing upon him immense riches. As with Tennyson. And what makes it odder still is that, after all, the average lettered man does not truly dislike poetry; he only dislikes it when it takes a certain form. He will read poetry and enjoy it, provided he is not aware that it is poetry. Poetry can exist authentically either in prose or in verse. Give him poetry concealed in prose and there is a chance that, taken off his guard, he will appreciate it. But show him a page of verse, and he will be ready to send for a policeman. The reason of this is that, though poetry may come to pass either in prose or in verse, it does actually happen far more frequently in verse than in prose; nearly all the very greatest poetry is in verse; verse is identified with the very greatest poetry, and the very greatest poetry

can only be understood and savoured by people who have put themselves through a considerable mental discipline. To others it is an exasperating weariness. Hence chiefly the fearful prejudice of the average lettered man against the mere form of verse.

The formation of literary taste cannot be completed until that prejudice has been conquered. My very difficult task is to suggest a method of conquering it. I address myself exclusively to the large class of people who, if they are honest, will declare that, while they enjoy novels, essays, and history, they cannot 'stand' verse. The case is extremely delicate, like all nervous cases. It is useless to employ the arts of reasoning, for the matter has got beyond logic; it is instinctive. Perfectly futile to assure you that verse will yield a higher percentage of pleasure than prose! You will reply: 'We believe you, but that doesn't help us.' Therefore I shall not argue. I shall venture to prescribe a

curative treatment (doctors do not argue); and I beg you to follow it exactly, keeping your nerve and your calm. Loss of self-control might lead to panic, and panic would be fatal.

First: Forget as completely as you can all your present notions about the nature of verse and poetry. Take a sponge and wipe the slate of your mind. In particular, do not harass yourself by thoughts of metre and verse forms. Second: Read William Hazlitt's essay 'On Poetry in General'. This essay is the first in the book entitled *Lectures on the English Poets*. It can be bought in various forms. I think the cheapest satisfactory edition is in Everyman's Library, where it is printed with another work of Hazlitt's, *The Spirit of the Age* (price 2s. net). I might have composed an essay of my own on the real harmless nature of poetry in general, but it could only have been an echo and a deterioration of Hazlitt's. He has put the truth

about poetry in a way as interesting, clear, and reassuring as anyone is ever likely to put it. I do not expect, however, that you will instantly gather the full message and enthusiasm of the essay. It will probably seem to you not to 'hang together'. Still, it will leave bright bits of ideas in your mind. Third: After a week's interval read the essay again. On a second perusal it will appear more persuasive to you.

Fourth: Open the Bible and read the fortieth chapter of Isaiah. It is the chapter which begins, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people', and ends, 'They shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' This chapter will doubtless be more or less familiar to you. It cannot fail (whatever your particular *ism*) to impress you, to generate in your mind sensations which you recognize to be of a lofty and unusual order, and which you will admit to be pleasurable. You will probably agree that the result of reading this chapter (even if your particular *ism* is opposed to its authority)

is finer than the result of reading a short story in a magazine or even an essay by Charles Lamb. Now the pleasurable sensations induced by the fortieth chapter of Isaiah are among the sensations usually induced by high-class poetry. The writer of it was a very great poet, and what he wrote is a very great poem. Fifth: After having read it, go back to Hazlitt, and see if you can find anything in Hazlitt's lecture which throws light on the psychology of your own emotions upon reading Isaiah.

Sixth: The next step is into unmistakable verse. It is to read one of Wordsworth's short narrative poems, *The Brothers*. There are editions of Wordsworth at a shilling, but I should advise the 'Golden Treasury' Wordsworth (3s. 6d. net), because it contains the famous essay by Matthew Arnold, who made the selection. I want you to read this poem aloud. You will probably have to hide yourself somewhere in order to do so, for, of course, you would not, as yet, care to be overheard spouting poetry.

Be good enough to forget that *The Brothers* is poetry. *The Brothers* is a short story, with a plain, clear plot. Read it as such. Read it simply for the story. It is very important at this critical stage that you should not embarrass your mind with preoccupations as to the *form* in which Wordsworth has told his story. Wordsworth's object was to tell a story as well as he could: just that. In reading aloud do not pay any more attention to the metre than you feel naturally inclined to pay. After a few lines the metre will present itself to you. Do not worry as to what kind of metre it is. When you have finished the perusal, examine your sensations.

Your sensations after reading this poem, and perhaps one or two other narrative poems of Wordsworth, such as *Michael*, will be different from the sensations produced in you by reading an ordinary, or even a very extraordinary, short story in prose. They may not be so sharp, so clear

and piquant, but they will probably be, in their mysteriousness and their vagueness, more impressive. I do not say that they will be diverting. I do not go so far as to say that they will strike you as pleasing sensations. (Be it remembered that I am addressing myself to an imaginary tyro in poetry.) I would qualify them as being 'disturbing'. Well, to disturb the spirit is one of the greatest aims of art. And a disturbance of spirit is one of the finest pleasures that a highly-organized man can enjoy. But this truth can only be really learnt by the repetitions of experience. As an aid to the more exhaustive examination of your feelings under Wordsworth, in order that you may better understand what he was trying to effect in you, and the means which he employed, I must direct you to Wordsworth himself. Wordsworth, in addition to being a poet, was unsurpassed as a critic of poetry. What Hazlitt does for poetry in the way of creating enthusiasm Wordsworth does in the way of

philosophic explanation. And Wordsworth's explanations of the theory and practice of poetry are written for the plain man. They pass the comprehension of nobody, and their direct, unassuming, and calm simplicity is extremely persuasive. Wordsworth's chief essays in throwing light on himself are the 'Advertisement', 'Preface', and 'Appendix' to *Lyrical Ballads;* the letters to Lady Beaumont and 'the Friend' and the 'Preface' to the Poems dated 1815. All this matter is strangely interesting and of immense educational value. It is the first class expert talking at ease about his subject. The essays relating to *Lyrical Ballads* will be the most useful for you. You will discover these precious documents in a volume entitled *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* (published by Humphrey Milford, 3s. 6d.), edited by that distinguished Wordsworthian Mr. Nowell C. Smith. It is essential that the student of poetry should become possessed, honestly or dishonestly, either of this volume or of the matter

which it contains. Those who have not read Wordsworth on poetry can have no idea of the naïve charm and the helpful radiance of his expounding. I feel that I cannot too strongly press Wordsworth's criticism upon you.

Between Wordsworth and Hazlitt you will learn all that it behoves you to know of the nature, the aims, and the results of poetry. It is no part of my scheme to dot the i's and cross the t's of Wordsworth and Hazlitt. I best fulfil my purpose in urgently referring you to them. I have only a single point of my own to make—a psychological detail. One of the main obstacles to the cultivation of poetry in the average sensible man is an absurdly inflated notion of the ridiculous. At the bottom of that man's mind is the idea that poetry is 'silly'. He also finds it exaggerated and artificial; but these two accusations against poetry can be satisfactorily answered. The charge of silliness, of being ridiculous, however, cannot

be refuted by argument. There is no logical answer to a guffaw. This sense of the ridiculous is merely a bad, infantile habit, in itself grotesquely ridiculous. You may see it particularly in the theatre. Not the greatest dramatist, not the greatest composer, not the greatest actor can prevent an audience from laughing uproariously at a tragic moment if a cat walks across the stage. But why ruin the scene by laughter? Simply because the majority of any audience is artistically childish. This sense of the ridiculous can only be crushed by the exercise of moral force. It can only be cowed. If you are inclined to laugh when a poet expresses himself more powerfully than you express yourself, when a poet talks about feelings which are not usually mentioned in daily papers, when a poet uses words and images which lie outside your vocabulary and range of thought, then you had better take yourself in hand. You have to decide whether you will be on the side of the angels or on the

side of the nincompoops. There is no surer sign of imperfect development than the impulse to snigger at what is unusual, naïve, or exuberant. And if you choose to do so, you can detect the cat walking across the stage in the sublimest passages of literature. But more advanced souls will grieve for you.

The study of Wordsworth's criticism makes the seventh step in my course of treatment. The eighth is to return to those poems of Wordsworth's which you have already perused, and read them again in the full light of the author's defence and explanation. Read as much Wordsworth as you find you can assimilate, but do not attempt either of his long poems. The time, however, is now come for a long poem. I began by advising narrative poetry for the neophyte, and I shall persevere with the prescription. I mean narrative poetry in the restricted sense; for epic poetry is narrative. *Paradise Lost* is narrative; so is *The Prelude*. I suggest neither of these great works. My choice

falls on Elizabeth Browning's *Aurora Leigh.* If you once work yourself 'into' this poem, interesting yourself primarily (as with Wordsworth) in the events of the story, and not allowing yourself to be obsessed by the fact that what you are reading is 'poetry'—if you do this, you are not likely to leave it unfinished. And before you reach the end you will have encountered *en route* pretty nearly all the moods of poetry that exist: tragic, humorous, ironic, elegiac, lyric—everything. You will have a comprehensive acquaintance with a poet's mind. I guarantee that you will come safely through if you treat the work as a novel. For a novel it effectively is, and a better one than any written by Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot. In reading, it would be well to mark, to take note of, the passages which give you the most pleasure, and then to compare these passages with the passages selected for praise by some authoritative critic. *Aurora Leigh* can be read in the volume of Mrs. Browning's *Poetical Works*

in the Oxford Editions of Standard Authors (3s. 6d.). The indispensable biographical information about Mrs. Browning can be obtained from Osbert Burdett's *The Brownings* (5s.), or from *Robert Browning*, by G. K. Chesterton (English Men of Letters Series, 3s. 6d.).

This accomplished, you may begin to choose your poets. Going back to Hazlitt, you will see that he deals with, among others, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Chatterton, Burns, and the Lake School. You might select one of these, and read under his guidance. Said Wordsworth: 'I was impressed by the conviction that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton.' (A word to the wise!) Wordsworth makes a fifth to these four. Concurrently with the careful, enthusiastic study of one of the undisputed classics, modern verse should be read. (I

beg you to accept the following statement: that if the study of classical poetry inspires you with a distaste for modern poetry, then there is something seriously wrong in the method of your development.) You may at this stage (and not before) commence an inquiry into questions of rhythm, verse-structure, and rhyme. There is an excellent short, concise, cheap handbook to English prosody by Robert Swann and Frank Sidgwick, called *The Making of Verse: a Guide to English Metres* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 3s. 6d.). With such a manual in front of you, you can acquire in a couple of hours a knowledge of the formal principles in which the music of English verse is rooted. The business is trifling. But the business of appreciating the inmost spirit of the greatest verse is tremendous and lifelong. It is not something that can be 'got up'.

CHAPTER X

BROAD COUNSELS

I HAVE now set down what appears to me to be the necessary considerations, recommendations, exhortations, and dehortations in aid of this delicate and arduous enterprise of forming the literary taste. I have dealt with the theory of literature, with the psychology of the author, and—quite as important—with the psychology of the reader. I have tried to explain the author to the reader and the reader to himself. To go into further detail would be to exceed my original intention, with no hope of ever bringing the constantly-enlarging scheme to a logical conclusion. My aim is not to provide a map, but a compass—two very different instruments. In the way of general advice it remains for me only to put before you three counsels which apply

more broadly than any I have yet offered to the business of reading.

You have within yourself a touchstone by which finally you can, and you must test every book that your brain is capable of comprehending. Does the book seem to you to be sincere and true? If it does, then you need not worry about your immediate feelings, or the possible future consequences of the book. You will ultimately like the book, and you will be justified in liking it. Honesty, in literature as in life, is the quality that counts first and counts last. But beware of your immediate feelings. Truth is not always pleasant. The first glimpse of truth is, indeed, usually so disconcerting as to be positively unpleasant, and our impulse is to tell it to go away, for we will have no truck with it. If a book arouses your genuine contempt, you may dismiss it from your mind. Take heed, however, lest you confuse contempt with anger. If a book really moves

you to anger, the chances are that it is a good book. Most good books have begun by causing anger which disguised itself as contempt. Demanding honesty from your authors, you must see that you render it yourself. And to be honest with oneself is not so simple as it appears. One's sensations and one's sentiments must be examined with detachment. When you have violently flung down a book, listen whether you can hear a faint voice saying within you: 'It's true, though!' And if you catch the whisper, better yield to it as quickly as you can. For sooner or later the voice will win. Similarly, when you are hugging a book, keep your ear cocked for the secret warning: 'Yes, but it isn't true.' For bad books, by flattering you, by caressing, by appealing to the weak or the base in you, will often persuade you what fine and splendid books they are. (Of course, I use the word 'true' in a wide and essential significance. I do not necessarily mean true to literal fact; I mean true to the plane of experience in which the book

moves. The truthfulness of *Ivanhoe*, for example, cannot be estimated by the same standards as the truthfulness of Stubbs's *Constitutional History*.) In reading a book, a sincere questioning of oneself, 'Is it true?' and a loyal abiding by the answer, will help more surely than any other process of ratiocination to form the taste. I will not assert that this question and answer are all-sufficient. A true book is not always great. But a great book is never untrue.

My second counsel is: In your reading you must have in view some definite aim—some aim other than the wish to derive pleasure. I conceive that to give pleasure is the highest end of any work of art, because the pleasure procured from any art is tonic, and transforms the life into which it enters. But the maximum of pleasure can only be obtained by regular effort, and regular effort implies the organization of that effort. Open-air walking is a glorious exercise; it is the walking itself which is glorious.

Nevertheless, when setting out for walking exercise, the sane man generally has a subsidiary aim in view. He says to himself either that he will reach a given point, or that he will progress at a given speed for a given distance, or that he will remain on his feet for a given time. He organizes his effort, partly in order that he may combine some other advantage with the advantage of walking, but principally in order to be sure that the effort shall be an adequate effort. The same with reading. Your paramount aim in poring over literature is to enjoy, but you will not fully achieve that aim unless you have also a subsidiary aim which necessitates the measurement of your energy. Your subsidiary aim may be aesthetic, moral, political, religious, scientific, erudite; you may devote yourself to a man, a topic, an epoch, a nation, a branch of literature, an idea—you have the widest latitude in the choice of an objective; but a definite objective you must have. In my earlier remarks as to method in reading, I

advocated, without insisting on, regular hours for study. But I both advocate and insist on the fixing of a date for the accomplishment of an allotted task. As an instance, it is not enough to say: 'I will inform myself completely as to the Lake School.' It is necessary to say: 'I will inform myself completely as to the Lake School before I am a year older.' Without this precautionary steeling of the resolution the risk of a humiliating collapse into futility is enormously magnified.

My third counsel is: Buy a library. It is obvious that you cannot read unless you have books. I began by urging the constant purchase of books—any books of approved quality, without reference to their immediate bearing upon your particular case. The moment has now come to inform you plainly that a bookman is, amongst other things, a man who possesses many books. A man who does not possess many books is not a bookman. For years

literary authorities have been favouring the literary public with wondrously selected lists of 'the best books'—the best novels, the best histories, the best poems, the best works of philosophy—or the hundred best or the fifty best of all sorts. The fatal disadvantage of such lists is that they leave out large quantities of literature which is admittedly first class. The bookman cannot content himself with a selected library. He wants, as a minimum, a library reasonably complete in all departments. With such a basis acquired, he can afterwards wander into those special by-ways of book-buying which happen to suit his special predilections. Every Englishman who is interested in any branch of his native literature, and who respects himself, ought to own a comprehensive and inclusive library of English literature, in comely and adequate editions. You may suppose that this counsel is a counsel of perfection. It is not. Mark Pattison laid down a rule that he who desired the name of book-lover must spend

five per cent of his income on books. The proposal does not seem extravagant, but even on a smaller percentage than five the average reader of these pages may become the owner, in a comparatively short space of time, of a reasonably complete English library, by which I mean a library containing the complete works of the supreme geniuses, representative important works of all the first class men in all departments, and specimen works of all the men of the second rank whose reputation is really a living reputation to-day. The scheme for a library, which I now present, begins before Chaucer and ends with the present day, and I am fairly sure that the majority of people will be startled at the total inexpensiveness of it. So far as I am aware, no such scheme has ever been printed before.

CHAPTER XI

AN ENGLISH LIBRARY: PERIOD I

For the purposes of book-buying, English literature is here divided, not strictly into historical epochs, but into four periods which, while scarcely arbitrary from the historical point of view, have nevertheless been calculated according to the space which they will occupy on the shelves and to the demands which they will make on the purse:

I. From the beginning to John Dryden, or roughly, to the end of the seventeenth century.

II. From William Congreve to Jane Austen, or roughly, the eighteenth century.

III. From Sir Walter Scott to Francis

Thompson, or roughly, the nineteenth century.

IV. From Thomas Hardy to Christopher Hassall, or, roughly, the first thirty-five years of the twentieth century.

Periods III and IV will bulk the largest and cost the most; not necessarily because they contain more absolutely great books than the other periods, but because they are nearest to us, and therefore fullest of interest for us.

The choice has not been confined to books of purely literary interest—that is to say, to works which are primarily works of literary art. Literature is the vehicle of philosophy, science, morals, religion, and history; and a library which aspires to be complete must comprise, in addition to imaginative works, all these branches of intellectual activity. Comprising all these branches, it cannot avoid comprising works of which the purely literary interest is almost nil.

On the other hand, the following are excluded from consideration:

i. Works whose sole importance is that they form a link in the chain of development. For example, nearly all the productions of authors between Chaucer and the beginning of the Elizabethan period, such as Gower, Hoccleve, and Skelton, whose works, for sufficient reason, are read only by professors and students who mean to be professors.

ii. Works not originally written in English, such as the works of that very great philosopher Roger Bacon, of whom this isle ought to be prouder than it is. To this rule, however, I have been constrained to make a few exceptions. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example, was written in Latin, but one does not easily conceive a library to be complete without it.

iii. Translations from foreign literature into English.

Here, then, are the lists for the first period:

PROSE WRITERS

	£	s.	d.
The Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
The Paston Letters: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Hugh Latimer, *Sermons*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Sir Thomas Malory, *Morte d'Arthur*: Globe Library	0	4	6
Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Cavendish, *Life of Cardinal Wolsey*: Temple Classics	0	2	0
Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages*: Everyman's Library (8 vols.)	0	16	0
Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Francis Bacon, *Essays and Advancement of Learning*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Thomas Dekker, *The Gul's Horn-Book*: Temple Classics	0	2	0
Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde*, ed. Greg: Oxford University Press	0	3	6
John Selden, *Table Talk*: New Universal Library (or, with other similar contents, under the general title of *Table Talk*, in Everyman's Library)	0	2	0
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Oxford Standard Authors	0	3	6
James Howell, *Familiar Letters*: Temple Classics (3 vols.)	0	6	0

	£	s.	d.
Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*: and *Urn Burial*: Golden Treasury Series (2 vols.)	0	7	0
Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*: Longmans' Devotional Series (2 vols.)	0	5	0
Isaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Dorothy Osborne, *Letters to Sir William Temple*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
John Evelyn, *Diary*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Samuel Pepys, *Diary*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
	£4	1	6

Omissions from the above list include such books as Camden's *Britannia*, Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, and Fuller's *Worthies*, whose lack of first-rate value as literature is not adequately compensated by their historical interest. As to the Bible, in the first place it is a translation, and in the second I assume that you already possess a copy.

POETS

	£	s.	d.
Beowulf: New Medieval Library	0	5	0
Everyman, and Other Interludes: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
William Langland, *Piers Plowman*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
Nicolas Udall, *Ralph Roister-Doister*, in the volume of *Minor Elizabethan Comedy*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
EDMUND SPENSER, *Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*: Temple Dramatists	0	1	6
Robert Greene, *The Tragical Reign of Selimus*: Temple Dramatists	0	1	6
Michael Drayton, *Minor Poems*: Tudor and Stuart Library	0	7	6
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, *Plays and Poems*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
Thomas Campion, *Works*: Oxford English Texts Series	0	12	6
Ben Jonson, *Plays*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
John Donne, *Complete Poems*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
John Donne, *Sermons*: Clarendon Press	0	6	0
John Webster, John Ford, *Plays*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Philip Massinger, *Plays*: Cunningham Edition	0	5	0

	£	s.	d.
Beaumont and Fletcher, *Selected Plays*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Herbert, *The Temple*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
ROBERT HERRICK, *Poems*: Muses Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Edmund Waller, *Poems*: Muses Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Sir John Suckling, *Poems*, in *Minor Poets of the 17th Century*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Richard Crashaw, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
Henry Vaughan, *Poems*: Muses Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*: Cambridge University Press	0	10	0
JOHN MILTON, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Standard Authors	0	3	6
JOHN MILTON, *Areopagitica*, etc.: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
ANDREW MARVELL, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
John Dryden, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Standard Authors	0	3	6
John Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, *etc.*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
(Thomas Percy), *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
	£5	15	6

There were many lesser writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries whose finest work, often small in quantity, scarcely

justifies the acquisition of a separate volume for each author, even when editions are available. Such writers as Samuel Daniel, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, George Peele, Sir Walter Raleigh, Thomas Sackville, Sir Philip Sidney, Drummond of Hawthornden, Thomas Heywood, George Wither, Sir Henry Wotton, Sir William Davenant, Thomas Randolph, Francis Quarles, and James Shirley are nowadays rarely represented in the lists of publishers, unless they happen, as is the case with Peele (see *Minor Elizabethan Tragedy* in Everyman's Library) or Carew (see *Minor Poets of the 17th Century* in the same series), to figure in some volume which groups a number of kindred authors. Individual poems will be found in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (8s. 6d.) or in two excellent volumes in Everyman's Library, *The Golden Treasury of English Lyrics* (Palgrave's Selection, augmented), and *The Golden Treasury of Longer Poems* (2s. each).

In addition, useful anthologies are included in the World's Classics, e.g., the

first two volumes of *English Verse*, edited by W. Peacock: i. *Early Lyrics to Shakespeare*, ii. *Campion to the Ballads* (2s. each). But Drummond of Hawthornden (2 vols.) and Sir Philip Sidney (1 vol.) are available in the Muses Library, 2s. each volume.

I have included in the above lists all important Elizabethan dramatists except John Marston, whose works are being published by Oliver and Boyd, of Edinburgh, and John Lyly, whose poetical and dramatic works are to be obtained only in the expensive edition in 3 volumes (42s.) published by the Clarendon Press.

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST PERIOD

			£ s. d.
21	Prose authors in	36 volumes costing	£4 1 6
28	Poets in	36 „ „	5 15 6
49		72	£9 17 0

The prices given are net; and all the volumes can be procured immediately by any bookseller.

CHAPTER XII

AN ENGLISH LIBRARY: PERIOD II

After dealing with the formation of a library of authors up to John Dryden, I must logically arrange next a scheme for the period covered roughly by the late 17th and 18th centuries. There is, however, no reason why the student in quest of a library should follow the chronological order. Indeed, I should advise him to attack the nineteenth century before the eighteenth, for the reason that, unless his taste happens to be peculiarly 'Augustan', he will obtain a more immediate satisfaction and profit from his acquisitions in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth. There is in eighteenth-century literature a considerable proportion of what I may term 'unattractive excellence', which one

must have for the purposes of completeness, but which may await actual perusal until more pressing and more human books have been read. I have particularly in mind the philosophical authors of the century.

PROSE WRITERS

	£	s.	d.
JOHN LOCKE, *Two Treatises on Civil Government*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*: Everyman's Library (abridged)	0	2	0
William Wycherley, *Plays*: Mermaid Series	0	3	6
WILLIAM CONGREVE, *Complete Works*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
JONATHAN SWIFT, *Gulliver's Travels*: World's Classics	0	2	0
JONATHAN SWIFT, *The Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books*, etc.: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
DANIEL DEFOE, *Robinson Crusoe*, Part 1: World's Classics	0	2	0
DANIEL DEFOE, *Journal of the Plague Year*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Joseph Addison, Sir Richard Steele, *The Spectator*: Everyman's Library (4 vols.)	0	8	0
William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Colley Cibber, *Autobiography*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0

	£	s.	d.
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, etc.: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*: Everyman's Library (4 vols.)	0	8	0
John Wesley, *Journal*: Everyman's Library (4 vols.)	0	8	0
Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Henry Fielding, *Amelia*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
David Hume, *Essays*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Horace Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*: Beckford's *Vathek*; Johnson's *Rasselas*, in *Shorter Novels of the 18th Century*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Horace Walpole, *Selected Letters*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Tobias Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0

	£	s.	d.
Oliver Goldsmith, *Works*: Everyman's Library (3 vols.)	0	6	0
Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Edmund Burke, *Writings on France*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, etc.: World's Classics	0	2	0
EDWARD GIBBON, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: World's Classics (7 vols.)	0	14	0
EDWARD GIBBON, *Autobiography*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN, *Plays*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Fanny Burney, *Evelina*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Gilbert White, *Natural History of Selborne*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Arthur Young, *Travels in France*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Mungo Park, *Travels*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
THOMAS ROBERT MALTHUS, *Essay on the Principles of Population*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Maria Edgeworth, *Helen*: Macmillan's illustrated edition	0	3	6
JANE AUSTEN, *Novels*: Heinemann's one volume edition	0	5	0
	£7	0	0

The principal omissions here are Jeremy Collier, whose outcry against the immorality of the stage is his slender title to remembrance; Richard Bentley, whose scholarship largely died with him, and whose chief works are no longer current; and 'Junius', who would have been deservedly forgotten long ago had there been a contemporaneous Sherlock Holmes to ferret out his identity.

POETS

	£	s.	d.
Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserved*: Temple Dramatists	0	2	0
Matthew Prior, *Poems on Several Occasions*: Cambridge English Classics	0	10	0
John Gay, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
ALEXANDER POPE, *Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
Isaac Watts, *Hymns*: Any hymn book	0	1	0
James Thomson, *Poems*: Muses Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Charles Wesley, *Hymns*: Any hymn book	0	1	0
Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, THOMAS GRAY, and William Collins, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
Thomas Chatterton, *Poems*: Muses Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0

LITERARY TASTE

	£	s.	d.
William Cowper, *Poems*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
William Cowper, *Letters*: World's Classics	0	2	0
George Crabbe, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
William Blake, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Robert Burns, *Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
	£2	7	6

SUMMARY OF THE PERIOD

				£	s.	d.
36	Prose writers in	67	volumes, costing	7	0	0
16	Poets in	16	,, ,,	2	7	6
52		83		£9	7	6

CHAPTER XIII

AN ENGLISH LIBRARY: PERIOD III

THE catalogue of necessary authors of the third and fourth periods being so long, it is convenient, but highly arbitrary, to divide the Prose Writers into Novelists and Non-Novelists. The result, at a first glance, may seem to be a farrago, more especially as the prose works of poets find their places in the third list; but in the cause of simplification many enormities must be committed. It is to be hoped that order will be maintained. Where no particular edition of a book is specified the original copyright edition is to be preferred.

PROSE WRITERS: NOVELISTS

	£	s.	d.
SIR WALTER SCOTT, *Waverley, Heart of Midlothian, Quentin Durward, Red-gauntlet, Ivanhoe, The Pirate, The Antiquary*: Everyman's Library (7 vols.)	0	14	0

	£	s.	d.
Thomas Love Peacock, *Novels*: New Universal Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village*: Selections: Temple Classics	0	2	0
Michael Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Frederick Marryat, *The King's Own*, *Mr. Midshipman Easy*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
John Galt, *Annals of the Parish* and *The Ayrshire Legatees*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Susan Ferrier, *Marriage*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Lord Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Charles Lever, *Harry Lorrequer*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Harrison Ainsworth, *Rookwood*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Harrison Ainsworth, *The Tower of London*: Nelson Classics	0	1	6
George Borrow, *Lavengro*, *The Romany Rye*, *The Bible in Spain*: Nelson Classics (3 vols.)	0	4	6
Lord Beaconsfield, *Sybil*, *Coningsby*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
W. M. THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair*: *Esmond* Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
CHARLES DICKENS, *Novels*: Everyman's Library (18 vols.)	1	16	0
Charles Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, *Barchester Towers*, *Framley Parsonage*, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (2 vols.), *Autobiography*: World's Classics (6 vols.)	0	12	0

	£	s.	d.
Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Henry Kingsley, *Ravenshoe*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, *Novels and Poems*: Nelson Classics (7 vols.)	0	10	6
Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford, Mary Barton, North and South, Life of Charlotte Brontë*: World's Classics (4 vols.)	0	8	0
George Eliot, *Adam Bede, Silas Marner, The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch*: Everyman's Library (5 vols.)	0	10	0
G. J. Whyte-Melville, *The Gladiators*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Macdonald, *Sir Gibbie*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White, The Moonstone*: Nelson Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
R. D. Blackmore, *Lorna Doone*: Nelson Classics	0	1	6
Samuel Butler, *Erewhon, Selections from the Note-books, The Way of All Flesh*: Travellers' Library (3 vols.)	0	10	6
Margaret Oliphant, *Salem Chapel*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*: Macmillan's Miniature Editions (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Joseph Henry Shorthouse, *John Inglesant*: Macmillan's Cottage Library	0	2	0
R. L. Stevenson, *Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae, The Merry Men* (short stories), *Virginibus Puerisque*: Nelson Classics (4 vols.)	0	6	0

	£	s.	d.
George Gissing, *Thyrza*	0	2	6
George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*: Constable's Miscellany	0	3	6

PROSE WRITERS: NON-NOVELISTS

Charles Lamb, *Works in Prose and Verse*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors (2 vols.)	0	7	0
Charles Lamb, *Letters*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Walter Savage Landor, *Selections*: Golden Treasury Series	0	3	6
Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*; and *Essays and Sketches*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
William Cobbett, *Selections*: Clarendon Press	0	3	6
William Hazlitt, *The English Poets* and *The English Comic Writers*; and *Table Talk*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
William Hazlitt, *The Plain Speaker*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Francis Jeffrey, *Essays from The Edinburgh Review*: New Universal Library	0	2	0
Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; *The English Mail Coach*, etc.; and *Reminiscences of the English Lakes and Lake Poets*: Everyman's Library (3 vols.)	0	6	0
J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Lord Macaulay, *History of England* (3) *Essays* (2): Everyman's Library (5 vols.)	0	10	0

	£	s.	d.
THOMAS CARLYLE, *The French Revolution* (2), *Cromwell* (3), *Sartor Resartus and Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1): Everyman's Library (6 vols.)	0	12	0
CHARLES DARWIN, *The Origin of Species;* and *The Voyage of the Beagle*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
A. W. Kinglake, *Eothen*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (1) and *Liberty, Representative Government*, etc. (1): World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
John Brown, *Horae Subsecivae*: World's Classics	0	2	0
Alexander Smith, *Dreamthorpe*, etc.: World's Classics	0	2	0
Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Henry Lewes, *Life of Goethe*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
James Anthony Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
John Tyndall, *Glaciers of the Alps*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Sir Henry Maine, *Ancient Law*: World's Classics	0	2	0
John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1), *Sesame and Lilies* (1), *The Stones of Venice* (3): George Allen & Unwin's Popular Edition (5 vols.)	0	12	6
Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (2 vols.)	0	10	6
Herbert Spencer, *Essays on Education*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Sir Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0

	£	s.	d.
J. H. Speke, *Sources of the Nile*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Thomas Henry Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature*, etc.; *Lectures and Lay Sermons*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man*: Thinkers' Library	0	1	0
Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Walter Pater, *Imaginary Portraits* and *Marius the Epicurean*: Caravan Edition (2 vols.)	0	5	0
Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*: Swan Series	0	3	6
Sir John Seeley, *Ecce Homo*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Sir G. O. Trevelyan, *Life of Macaulay*: World's Classics (2 vols.)	0	4	0
John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
Oscar Wilde, *Plays, Stories, Poems and Essays*: Collins's Pocket Series (3 vols.)	0	6	0
F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*: Swan Library	0	3	6
Mark Rutherford, *Pages from a Journal*: World's Classics	0	2	0
	£16	6	6

Lastly, here is the list of nineteenth-century poets with whose work the student

should acquaint himself. Where no information is given as to the edition to be bought, the original copyright edition is still the best.

POETS

	£	s.	d.
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *Complete Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *Literary Criticism*: Nowell Smith's Edition	0	3	6
Sir Walter Scott, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Robert Southey, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Robert Southey, *Life of Nelson*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
S. T. COLERIDGE, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
S. T. COLERIDGE, *Biographia Literaria*; and *Lectures on Shakespeare*: Everyman's Library (2 vols.)	0	4	0
JOHN KEATS, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
JOHN KEATS, *Letters*: Forman Edition, Oxford University Press	0	12	6
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
LORD BYRON, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
LORD BYRON, *Letters*: Dent's Illustrated Classics	0	7	6

	£	s.	d.
Thomas Hood, *Poems*: World's Classics	0	2	0
James and Horace Smith, *Rejected Addresses*: New Universal Library	0	2	0
John Keble, *The Christian Year*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
George Darley, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
T. L. Beddoes, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
Thomas Moore, *Poems*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
James Clarence Mangan, *Poems*: D. J. O'Donoghue's Edition	0	5	0
W. Mackworth Praed, *Select Poems*: Oxford Miscellany	0	3	6
R. S. Hawker, *Cornish Ballads*: C. E. Byles's Edition	0	6	0
Edward FitzGerald, *Omar Khayyám*: Golden Treasury Series	0	3	6
Arthur Hugh Clough, *Selections*: Oxford Plain Texts Series	0	3	6
LORD TENNYSON, *Poetical Works*: Globe Edition	0	4	6
ROBERT BROWNING, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
ROBERT BROWNING, *The Ring and the Book*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
MATTHEW ARNOLD, *Complete Poetical Works*: Macmillan Edition	0	4	6
MATTHEW ARNOLD, *Essays*: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
Coventry Patmore, *Selected Poems*: Phoenix Library	0	3	6

	£	s.	d.
T. E. Brown, *Poems*: Golden Treasury Series	0	3	6
C. S. Calverley, *Verses, Translations and Fly-Leaves*: Bell Edition.	0	2	6
Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*, etc.: Everyman's Library	0	2	0
D. G. Rossetti, *Poetical Works*: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*, etc.: World's Classics	0	2	0
James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night*: Thinkers' Library. (Watts)	0	1	0
Jean Ingelow, *Poems*: Muses Library	0	2	0
William Morris, *Prose and Poetry*, 1856–70: Oxford Editions of Standard Authors	0	3	6
Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*: Oxford Press	0	5	0
W. E. Henley, *Poems*	0	6	0
Francis Thompson, *Selected Poems*	0	5	0
	£7	10	0

Poets whom I have omitted after hesitation are: Ebenezer Elliott, Thomas Woolner, William Barnes, Gerald Massey, and Charles Jeremiah Wells. On the other hand, I have had no hesitation about omitting David Moir, Felicia Hemans, Aytoun, Sir Edwin Arnold, and Sir Lewis

Morris. I have included John Keble in deference to much enlightened opinion, but against my inclination; and Fitz-Gerald because *Omar Khayyám* is much less a translation than an original work.

SUMMARY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

			£	s.	d.
68	Prose Writers in 155 vols. costing		16	6	6
35	Poets in 42 „ „		7	10	0
103	197		23	16	6

CHAPTER XIV

AN ENGLISH LIBRARY: PERIOD IV

THE lists which follow are more tentative than those given in previous chapters. They contain the names of living writers, some of whom are much in the public eye, and some of whom have not been fortunate enough to keep their places there. And the names are set out in a manner to suggest changes in literary fashion which have occurred since the first edition of *Literary Taste* was published. Fashion, however, is not taste. It is impulsive and partisan; and while, excusably, its followers try to justify their preferences by argument drawn from current aesthetics they really talk great nonsense which it would be, in a book of this kind, quite absurd to regard.

When the first edition of *Literary Taste*

was published, all—or nearly all—of the older men and women whose names are now to be given were at the height of their powers. Some of them have now been long dead, and some, though physically alive, have been depressed in reputation or half-forgotten with the coming of new gods. I cannot say whether all will at some time revive; but it is likely that a number of the books here indicated will drop out of any edition of *Literary Taste* prepared in, say, the year 1950. Nevertheless, any reader who elastically follows the lists will be in a state of mind to approach contemporary literature with personal standards. He will have what is known as a literary 'background'. As was said at this point in the first edition of the present book:

'When you have read, wholly or in part, a majority of these volumes, *with enjoyment*, you may begin to whisper to yourself that your literary taste is formed; and you may pronounce judgment on modern works which come before the bar of your opinion

in the calm assurance that, though to err is human, you do at any rate know what you are talking about.'

The lists in this chapter are three. They contain, first, books by those authors the bulk of whose writing has been in the form of Novel or Play; second, books, the literary quality of which is high, by travellers, scientists, and philosophers; and third, the works of those who are best known or described as poets. In the first group you will find Thomas Hardy; in the last, James Joyce.

NOVELISTS AND DRAMATISTS

	£	s.	d.
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CHAPTER XIVa

APPENDIX

SHOWING TITLES IN THE PENGUIN OR PELICAN LIBRARIES WHICH MAY BE ADDED TO OR SUBSTITUTED FOR THOSE NAMED PREVIOUSLY IN MORE EXPENSIVE EDITIONS.

IN themselves, the titles here listed form a remarkable library, particularly of what is immediately outstanding in modern literature; and I have taken the opportunity afforded by the composition of this list to add half-a-dozen books previously excluded.

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CHAPTER XV

MENTAL STOCKTAKING

GREAT books do not spring from something accidental in the great men who wrote them. They are the effluence of their very core, the expression of the life itself of the authors. And literature cannot be said to have served its true purpose until it has been translated into the actual life of him who reads. It does not succeed until it becomes the vehicle of the vital. Progress is the gradual result of the unending battle between human reason and human instinct, in which the former slowly but surely wins. The most powerful engine in this battle is literature. It is the vast reservoir of true ideas and high emotions—and life is constituted of ideas and emotions. In a world deprived of literature, the intellectual and emotional activity of all but a few excep-

tionally gifted men would quickly sink and retract to a narrow circle. The broad, the noble, the generous would tend to disappear for want of accessible storage. And life would be correspondingly degraded, because the fallacious idea and the petty emotion would never feel the upward pull of the ideas and emotions of genius. Only by conceiving a society without literature can it be clearly realized that the function of literature is to raise the plain towards the top level of the peaks. Literature *exists* so that where one man has lived finely, ten thousand may afterwards live finely. It is a means of life; it concerns the living essence.

Of course, literature has a minor function, that of passing the time in an agreeable and harmless fashion, by giving momentary faint pleasure. Vast multitudes of people (among whom may be numbered not a few habitual readers) utilize only this minor function of literature; by implication they class it with golf, bridge, or soporifics. Literary genius, however, had no intention

of competing with these devices for fleeting the empty hours; and all such use of literature may be left out of account.

You, O serious student of many volumes, believe that you have a sincere passion for reading. You hold literature in honour, and your last wish would be to debase it to a paltry end. You are not of those who read because the clock had just struck nine and one can't go to bed till eleven. You are animated by a real desire to get out of literature *all* that literature will give. And in that aim you keep on reading, year after year, and the grey hairs come. But amid all this steady tapping of the reservoir, do you ever take stock of what you have *acquired?* Do you ever pause to make a valuation, in terms of your own life, of that which you are daily absorbing, or imagine you are absorbing? Do you ever satisfy yourself by proof that you are absorbing anything at all, that the living waters, instead of vitalizing you, are not

running off you as though you were a duck in a storm? Because, if you omit this mere business precaution, it may well be that you, too, without knowing it, are little by little joining the triflers who read only because eternity is so long. It may well be that even your alleged sacred passion is, after all, simply a sort of drug-habit. The suggestion disturbs and worries you. You dismiss it impatiently; but it returns.

How (you ask, unwillingly) can a man perform a mental stocktaking? How can he put a value on what he gets from books? How can he effectively test, in cold blood, whether he is receiving from literature all that literature has to give him?

The test is not so vague, nor so difficult, as might appear.

If a man is not thrilled by intimate contact with nature: with the sun, with the earth, which is his origin and the arouser of his acutest emotions—

If he is not troubled by the sight of beauty in many forms—

If he is devoid of curiosity concerning his fellow-men and his fellow-animals—

If he does not have glimpses of the unity of all things in an orderly progress—

If he is chronically 'querulous, dejected, and envious'—

If he is pessimistic—

If he is of those who talk about 'this age of shams', 'this age without ideals', 'this hysterical age', and this heaven-knows-what-age—

Then that man, though he reads undisputed classics for twenty hours a day, though he has a memory of steel, though he rivals Porson in scholarship and Sainte-Beuve in judgment, is not receiving from literature what literature has to give. Indeed, he is chiefly wasting his time. *Unless* he can read differently, it were better for him if he sold all his books, gave to the poor, and played croquet. He fails because he had not assimilated into his existence the vital essences which genius put into the books that have merely passed before his eyes; because genius has offered

him faith, courage, vision, noble passion, curiosity, love, a thirst for beauty, and he has not taken the gift; because genius has offered him the chance of living fully, and he is only half alive, for it is only in the stress of fine ideas and emotions that a man may be truly said to live. This is not a moral invention, but a simple fact, which will be attested by all who know what that stress is.

What! You talk learnedly about Shakespeare's sonnets! Have you heard Shakespeare's terrific shout:

Full many a glorious morning I have seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

And yet, can you see the sun over the viaduct at Loughborough Junction of a morning, and catch its rays in the Thames off Dewar's whisky monument, and not shake with the joy of life? If so, you and Shakespeare are not yet in communication. What! You pride

yourself on your beautiful edition of Casaubon's translation of *Marcus Aurelius*, and you savour the cadences of the famous:

> This day I shall have to do with an idle, curious man, with an unthankful man, a railer, a crafty, false, or an envious man. All these ill qualities have happened unto him, through ignorance of that which is truly good and truly bad. But I that understand the nature of that which is good, that it only is to be desired, and of that which is bad, that it only is truly odious and shameful: who know, moreover, that this transgressor, whosoever he be, is my kinsman, not by the same blood and seed, but by participation of the same reason and of the same divine particle—how can I be hurt? . . .

And with these cadences in your ears you go and quarrel with a cabman!

You would be ashamed of your literary self to be caught in ignorance of Whitman, who wrote:

> Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what,

shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

And yet, having achieved a motor car, you lose your temper when it breaks down half-way up a hill!

You know your Wordsworth, who has been trying to teach you about:

> The Upholder of the tranquil soul
> That tolerates the indignities of Time
> And, from the centre of Eternity
> All finite motions over-ruling, lives
> In glory immutable.

But you are capable of being seriously unhappy when your suburban train selects a tunnel for its repose!

And the A.V. of the Bible, which you now read, not as your forefathers read it, but with an aesthetic delight, especially in the Apocrypha! You remember:

> Whatsoever is brought upon thee, take cheerfully, and be patient when thou art changed to a low estate. For gold is tried in the fire and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity.

And yet you are ready to lie down and die because a woman has scorned you! Go to!

You think some of my instances approach the ludicrous? They do. They are meant to do so. But they are no more ludicrous than life itself. And they illustrate in the most workaday fashion how you can test whether your literature fulfils its function of informing and transforming your existence.

I say that if daily events and scenes do not constantly recall and utilize the ideas and emotions contained in the books which you have read or are reading; if the memory of these books does not quicken the perception of beauty, wherever you happen to be, does not help you to correlate the particular trifle with the universal, does not smooth out irritation and give dignity to sorrow—then you are, consciously or not, unworthy of your high vocation as a bookman. You may say that I am preaching a sermon. The fact is, I am. My mood is a severely moral mood. For when I reflect upon the

difference between what books have to offer and what even relatively earnest readers take the trouble to accept from them, I am appalled (or should be appalled, did I not know that the world is moving) by the sheer inefficiency, the bland, complacent failure of the earnest reader. I am like yourself, the spectacle of inefficiency rouses my holy ire.

Before you begin upon another masterpiece, set out in a row the masterpieces which you are proud of having read during the past year. Take the first on the list, that book which you perused in all the zeal of your New Year resolutions for systematic study. Examine the compartments of your mind. Search for the ideas and emotions which you have garnered from that book. Think, and recollect when last something from that book recurred to your memory apropos of your own daily commerce with humanity. Is it history—when did it throw a light for you on modern politics? Is it science—when did it show you order in

apparent disorder, and help you to put two and two together into an inseparable four? Is it ethics—when did it influence your conduct in a twopenny-halfpenny affair between man and man? Is it a novel—when did it help you to 'understand all and forgive all'? Is it poetry—when was it a magnifying glass to disclose beauty to you, or a fire to warm your cooling faith? If you can answer these questions satisfactorily, your stocktaking as regards the fruit of your traffic with that book may be reckoned satisfactory. If you cannot answer them satisfactorily, then either you chose the book badly or your impression that you *read* it is a mistaken one.

When the result of this stocktaking forces you to the conclusion that your riches are not so vast as you thought them to be, it is necessary to look about for the causes of the misfortune. The causes may be several. You may have been reading worthless books. This, however, I should say at once, is

extremely unlikely. Habitual and confirmed readers, unless they happen to be reviewers, seldom read worthless books. In the first place, they are so busy with books of proved value that they have only a small margin of leisure left for very modern works, and generally, before they can catch up with the age, Time or the critic has definitely threshed for them the wheat from the chaff. No! Mediocrity has not much chance of hoodwinking the serious student.

It is less improbable that the serious student has been choosing his books badly. He may do this in two ways—absolutely and relatively. Every reader of long standing has been through the singular experience of suddenly *seeing* a book with which his eyes have been familiar for years. He reads a book with a reputation and thinks: 'Yes, this is a good book. This book gives me pleasure.' And then after an interval, perhaps after half a lifetime, something mysterious happens to his mental sight. He

picks up the book again, and sees a new and profound significance in every sentence, and he says: 'I was perfectly blind to this book before.' Yet he is no cleverer than he used to be. Only something has happened to him. Let a gold watch be discovered by a supposititious man who has never heard of watches. He has a sense of beauty. He admires the watch, and takes pleasure in it. He says: 'This is a beautiful piece of bric-à-brac; I fully appreciate this delightful trinket.' Then imagine his feelings when someone comes along with the key; imagine the light flooding his brain. Similar incidents occur in the eventful life of the constant reader. He has no key, and never suspects that there exists such a thing as a key. That is what I call a choice absolutely bad.

The choice is relatively bad when, spreading over a number of books, it pursues no order, and thus results in a muddle of faint impressions each blurring the rest. Books must be allowed to help

one another; they must be skilfully called in to each other's aid. And that this may be accomplished some guiding principle is necessary. 'And what', you demand, 'should that guiding principle be?' How do I know? Nobody, fortunately, can make your principles for you. You have to make them for yourself. But I will venture upon this general observation: that in the mental world what counts is not numbers but co-ordination. As regards facts and ideas, the great mistake made by the average well-intentioned reader is that he is content with the names of things instead of occupying himself with the causes of things. He seeks answers to the question What? instead of to the question Why? He studies history, and never guesses that all history is caused by the facts of geography. He is a botanical expert, and can take you to where the *Sibthorpia europoea* grows, and never troubles to wonder what the earth would be without its cloak of plants. He wanders forth of starlit evenings

and will name you with unction all the constellations from Andromeda to the Scorpion; but if you ask him why Venus can never be seen at midnight, he will tell you that he has not bothered with the scientific details. He has not learned that names are nothing, and the satisfaction of the lust of the eye a trifle compared to the imaginative vision of which scientific 'details' are the indispensable basis.

Most reading, I am convinced, is unphilosophical; that is to say, it lacks the element which more than anything else quickens the poetry of life. Unless and until a man has formed a scheme of knowledge, be it a mere skeleton, his reading must necessarily be unphilosophical. He must have attained to some notion of the inter-relations of the various branches of knowledge before he can properly comprehend the branch in which he specializes. If he has not drawn an outline map upon which he can fill in whatever knowledge

comes to him, as it comes, and on which he can trace the affinity of every part with every other part, he is assuredly frittering away a large percentage of his efforts. There are certain philosophical works which, once they are mastered, seem to have performed an operation for cataract, so that he who was blind, having read them, henceforward sees cause and effect working in and out everywhere. To use another figure, they leave stamped on the brain a chart of the entire province of knowledge.

Such a work is Spencer's *First Principles*. I know that it is nearly useless to advise people to read *First Principles*. They are intimidated by the sound of it; and it costs as much as a dress-circle seat at the theatre. But if they would, what brilliant stocktakings there might be in a few years! Why, if they would only read such detached essays as that on 'Manners and Fashion', or 'The Genesis of Science' (in the volume of Spencer's *Essays on Education*, in Every-

man's Library), the magic illumination, the necessary power of 'synthetizing' things, might be vouchsafed to them. In any case, the lack of some such disciplinary, co-ordinating measure will amply explain many disastrous stocktakings. The manner in which one single ray of light, one single precious hint, will clarify and energize the whole mental life of him who receives it, is among the most wonderful and heavenly of intellectual phenomena. Some men search for that light and never find it. But most men never search for it.

The superlative cause of disastrous stocktakings remains, and it is much more simple than the one with which I have just dealt. It consists in the absence of meditation. People read, and read, and read, blandly unconscious of their effrontery in assuming that they can assimilate without any further effort the vital essence which the author has breathed into them. They cannot. And the proof that they do

not is shown all the time in their lives. I say that if a man does not spend at least as much time in actively and definitely thinking about what he has read as he has spent in reading, he is simply insulting his author. If he does not submit himself to intellectual and emotional fatigue in classifying the communicated ideas, and in emphasizing on his spirit the imprint of the communicated emotions—then reading with him is a pleasant pastime and nothing else. This is a distressing fact. But it is a fact. It is distressing, for the reason that meditation is not a popular exercise. If a friend asks you what you did last night, you may answer, 'I was reading', and he will be impressed and you will be proud. But if you answer, 'I was meditating', he will have a tendency to smile and you will have a tendency to blush. I know this. I feel it myself. (I cannot offer any explanation.) But it does not shake my conviction that the absence of meditation is the main origin of disappointing stocktakings.

last chapter is very good

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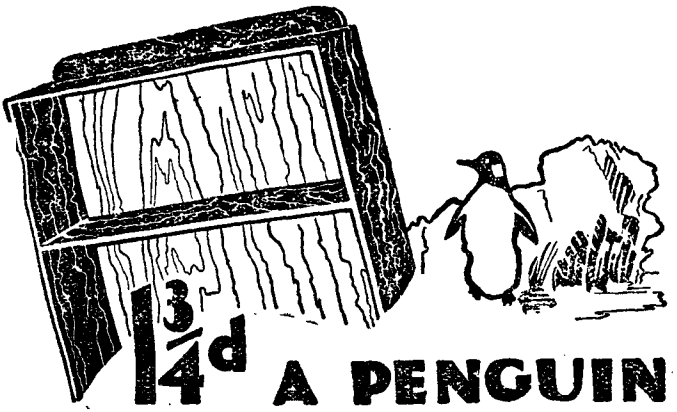

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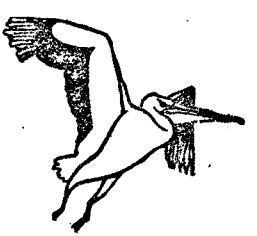

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PREFACE

THIS volume contains the substance of a course of nine lectures on English literature which I delivered to brother-officers prisoners of war in Germany, a first time at Oflag VI B, during the winter and spring of 1941–42, and a second time in the Unterlager, Oflag IX A/H, during May, June, and July, 1943. On each occasion I was guided by the following considerations. Most other ranks in captivity in Germany have been put to work. Not so officers. Theirs is a situation of whole-time leisure. And since the latter part of 1941 there have been plenty of books. So for reading, British officers in German hands have an opportunity such as few of them can ever have had before. Indeed, not only have many never before had so much *time available* for reading; many have found themselves reading for the *first time*. Once the novelty of doing so wore off, they have been apt to wonder how they might go on reading to their own best advantage. And so it seemed appropriate, if there were going to be lectures on literature, that the contents of the lectures should correspond with some such general title as *Reading for Profit*.

Now it is not necessary to be a prisoner of war in order to be assailed by the question of how to read to one's own best advantage. And as the lectures have been well received on both occasions of their delivery in Germany, I have been led to hope that they might appeal to a wider public. That is why they are now to appear in print.

It is a pleasure to record my indebtedness to Lieutenant T. Garside for the gift of exercise-books at a time when paper was scarce, and to Colonel E. F. Ledward, Major Elliott Viney, Lieutenant T. Garside, and Lieutenant Michael Langham, for the loan of books. Among other officers to whom I am grateful are Brigadier L. Parrington, Colonel R. T. Holland, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Ellison-Macartney, Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Adams, Lieutenant-

Colonel Piggott, Major F. G. Ruff, the Reverend D. H. C. Read, C.F., Captain J. H. Sewell, Captain Maurice Hart, Captain R. G. Bateson, Lieutenant Malcolm Fry, Lieutenant David Holland, and Lieutenant A. H. Bryan.

My thanks are due to Miss E. Herdman and the Book Section of the British Red Cross, as well as to several friends in England, for the gift and despatch of books.

Numerous references that occur in the lectures were verified in the *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* by George Sampson, from which also I obtained such dates of original publication as I provide.

Finally, let me acknowledge the courtesy of the German military authorities in enabling me to typewrite a portion of my MS. and in allowing me to send the whole of it home.

M. B.

Spangenberg,
Kur-Hessen.
January 1944

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FIRST LECTURE

THE CAPITAL INVESTMENT

I HOPE none of you gentlemen have come here under the impression that I am going to tell you how to make money. It is true you might have been misled by the title of this course of lectures. The title—let me admit it—is ambiguous. When it occurred to me to call the course "Reading for Profit," I dare say I had at the back of my mind the title of a well-known manual for aspiring writers. I mean *Complete Writing for Profit* by Michael Joseph. That manual, as some of you may know, deals with writing not as a science or as an art but as an industry. It is designed to show those who care to study it not merely how to write, but how to write in order to sell. Much of it is an account of markets for pieces of writing and of the requirements of these markets. In short, there is no denying that in calling his book *Complete Writing for Profit*, what Mr. Joseph meant by the word "profit" was simply money. The phrase "to write for profit" is commonly understood to mean to write for money; and in the same way the phrase "to read for profit" may be taken to mean to read for money. We can all think of people who seem to make money by reading. They are the readers employed by publishers, the reviewers of new books in the press, and the literary critics. A publisher's reader reads a manuscript and then writes a report on it. A reviewer reads a new book and then writes a notice or review of it. There are people who make a living in this way. It is popularly fancied that what they are paid for is not what they write—the report or the review—but the reading. They can be said to read for profit as others write for profit. This being so, it would have been excusable if, on seeing this course of lectures on English literature announced as a course of lectures on Reading for Profit, you had supposed I intended to try to show you

how to become a publisher's reader, a reviewer, or a literary critic.

So I begin by saying that *that is not what I intend at all.* As announced, these lectures are intended to be going to help us to read for profit, but the profit in question is not money. It is, in fact, profit of quite another kind. Intangible, impalpable, it is yet a profit of the highest value and importance. It is a profit which is manifested in the consequences of our reading upon both the waking moments and the dreams of the individual, upon his character, and upon his conduct. That reading can and does influence character, that reading can and does influence conduct, has been pointed out most recently, as far as I know, by Sir Richard Livingstone, the president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in a little book entitled *The Future in Education.* In the same book he says also that our reading may paint pictures on walls of the mind that would otherwise remain bare. That is another way of saying that reading can and does have consequences for our waking moments and for our dreams. In making these claims for reading, Sir Richard Livingstone does not stand alone. He is but the last in a long line of witnesses, a line which stretches back across history, through Milton, who declared a good book to be "the precious life-blood of a master spirit," all the way to Aristotle, who remarked that the best reason any man can have for reading is that the reading will be "for the sake of his own development."

Statements of that sort sound very fine. But in the eyes of anybody who is not already aware of reading for *profit* they must have one great defect. They fail to make him see what the profit is. Such statements are intelligible only to those who already know of the profit by experience —by direct acquaintance. In fact, the profit is not only, as I have said, intangible or impalpable. It is exclusively itself. That is to say, for any one to come to know it by description is impossible. It can only be known in being won. Till we have won it, the most that we can be given of its nature are only hints.

Reading—and of course I mean by "reading," reading of the right books in the right way—may be expected to furnish the mind, the imagination, and the feelings of a reader with a rich and varied material. In this way reading acts at the very least as a stimulus. Our mind, our imagination, our feelings, are all quickened by what they take in through reading. That is what Sir Richard Livingstone refers to in saying that reading may paint pictures on walls of the mind that would otherwise remain bare. Both our waking moments and our dreams become more vivid. Many people are apt to recollect at unforeseen moments lines from poems they have read or even to recollect complete short poems. They will be putting on their boots or preparing to get out of a train when they will suddenly recall, say, the lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost :*

> And with the setting sun
> Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
> On Lemnos the Aegean isle.

or lines such as these from Byron's *Don Juan :*

> Her beauties seized the unconscious hour of night
> All bashfully to struggle into light.

Many people, too, are apt to recall at odd moments a scene from some novel they have read—often that they read long ago. They may be opening the evening paper or sitting in the dentist's chair, and suddenly they will think of Becky Sharp's first meeting with Sir Pitt Crawley in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* or of the admiration which the bravo in Stevenson's *Catriona* expresses for David Balfour's courage after he has compelled him to fight a duel and discovers he cannot hold a sword, or of Anne Elliott's great moment at the end of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* when she gives voice to her views on constancy. It is obvious that merely to be visited at odd times by such recollections—recollections of poems and recollections of novels—is bound to be pleasurable. When, as often happens, the first recollection of lines of poetry or of some scene in fiction brings in its train the recollection of the context of the lines or scene, the pleasure will be so much

the greater. Moreover, having these recollections has consequences for our mental and affective being. In particular, our imagination is dependent for its activity on the quantity and quality of its available material. One clear so-called psychological law is that there is nothing in imagination that has not been in sensation. If we are apt to have recollections such as I have just spoken of, then our imagination will be made thereby both more active, and active to better purpose, than it would without them.

Altogether, simply to be visited by these recollections at odd moments of his waking life and to be able to dwell on them, and no doubt also to have them nourishing his dreams, gives a man an indefinable advantage over his less fortunate fellows. To have no more by way of profit from our reading is far from despicable. But in fact, having these recollections is, so to speak, no more than the fringe of the profit.

It may be said that the profit is really being obtained when it amounts to an enlargement of the understanding, or rather the intuition, of the nature of life which we obtain from our individual experience. The direct experience of life which any one person can acquire is inevitably narrow. Life itself is too vast, too varied, and too complex for any one individual—even if he is what we call a public man—to meet with more than an inadequately representative fragment of it at first hand in the course of his own life. Yet the greater the variety of human experience in general that we can, so to speak, assimilate, the better for our understanding, our intuition, of the nature of life. It is through our reading that we are best able to learn of the experience of life of other people; through our reading that we are best able to find out what other people—remote from us in space and often remote from us in time as well—have thought, have felt, have imagined, and hoped. Hence a further item in the profit which we may obtain from reading—I may even say, the main profit—is that our own experience of life and our own intuition of the characteristics—the nature—of human existence, both in

its solitude and in society, will be supplemented, broadened, and intensified. Thereby, our contacts and relations with our fellow-men are likely to be made in their turn smoother, our expectations are likely to be brought in their turn within the bounds of possible fulfilment. In a word, our reading is likely to mellow our discontent. And even that is not all that our reading can do for us. It can do more still. It can enlighten us regarding human ideals at large, and so can lend substance to our own vision and aspiration.

These hints or indications of the nature of the profit unconnected with money that may accrue to us from our reading are enough to show us its value and importance. But, as I have said, they do not show us what the profit actually is. They do not make us conscious of it. The profit is, I repeat, only to be known in being won. Curiously enough, notwithstanding its importance and its worth, it is won by only a few. Nowadays, nearly everybody reads. Yet most people who read do so without thereby obtaining any profit. Most readers obtain from their reading no profit, no profit whatsoever. It is in order to emphasize this that I have given these lectures the general title : *Reading for Profit*. As I have admitted, the phrase "Reading for Profit" is ambiguous. And, since it is ambiguous, I could have chosen some other title. I could have called the lectures : *Making the Most of Our Reading*, or something like that. Instead I decided on the title : *Reading for Profit*. And I did so because, in spite of its ambiguity, it does help me, I think, to contrast sharply reading as most people read, without profit, and reading as I want to suggest we should read, or, at least, try to read.

As far as my observation goes, the great majority of readers read solely for the momentary entertainment, relaxation, or distraction which a book affords them. In other words, they read solely in order to pass the time agreeably. Time, it has frequently been observed, is a most precious treasure. This treasure most readers squander. Incredible and preposterous as it sounds, time

—"the subtle thief of youth"—time hangs on their hands. And having discovered that books offer an agreeable means of getting rid of chunks of it, they read. It is only too evident that they cannot read for anything else. If they did, they would carry away something from their reading; and there is no sign that they do. I do not say that their reading has no influence upon them. But if they are influenced, it is unawares. And when we are being influenced unawares, the influence may be beneficial or it may be detrimental: we cannot tell. Hence, so far as these readers are able to know, they carry nothing away from their reading; and possibly they are unwittingly being influenced to their detriment.

The evidence that they carry nothing away consciously is that they have nothing to say about their reading. The chronicle of their wasted time is almost a blank. All they seem to be able to say about whatever they have just read is either that they have liked it or that they have disliked it. They are referring, that is to say, to the impression made upon them by a book while they were actually reading it. Once their reading is finished and the book closed, the experience of reading it is, as far as they are concerned, ended and done with. The proof of that is that many of them are at once ready to take up another book, and one totally unconnected with the one they have just finished. When, however, we are reading for profit, a book is not ended and done with as soon as we have put it down. The profit—the conscious profit—to be had from reading derives as much from what we may think and feel after the reading is over as from what happens to us while we actually read. Of course then, exactly as when reading without profit, things already happen to us during the actual reading. And they are fundamental. There can be no profit from reading unless we read. But the extent of the profit, whether or not there shall be any profit at all—that must depend on what we are able to carry away from the reading of a book and how we are affected by having read it once the reading is done.

For our reading to affect us in this way *after* it is done, certain things are required. Whether or not it can so affect us and move us, whether or not it can colour our lives, influence our character, and influence our conduct, and also *how far* it shall so affect and influence us—that must depend to some extent—indeed, to a very great extent —on our own susceptibility and sensitiveness to the written word. And in large measure our susceptibility and sensitiveness to the written word are functions of the quality of our own individual experience and of our ensuing intuition of the nature of actual life. Too many people, it is obvious, have no real understanding, no awareness, of *life*. To the valuable, the worth while, in life, they are oblivious. Life interests and excites them, it is alive for them, only as it is freakish or odd. I confess I find it surprising that the exclusive preoccupation of such large sections of the public at present with the freakish and odd *in life, to the* exclusion of all else, should not give rise to more comment, to more concern. This can only be because it is not sufficiently realized. The outlook on life of too many people to-day is summed up in the fascination exerted upon them by the popular press ; or they may be compared to people with a mania for going to the zoo and to the fair. As we know, the popular press entertains its readers mainly with information about oddities and *freaks* : " Duke Marries Flower Girl," " Man Bites Dog " —that kind of thing. To gape at wild animals in cages is to treat them as being merely odd, and it is at the fair that the bearded lady, the Siamese or coadunate twins, and other freaks are on view. So long as people react to life entirely through an interest in the freakish and odd, they are foredoomed never to read for profit. For this profit is intimately bound up with life beyond freakishness and oddity—with life itself, with the seriousness of life and the serious in life. If we are to read for profit, we need first to realize the nature of the tragic and the nature of the truly momentous in life ; we have got to take life seriously. It is essential that whenever we come across the serious, the

valuable, the worth while in its true form, alike in real life and in books, we should not fail to recognize it. That, in the first place, is what, if possible, we need to train ourselves for. What I mean by the freakish and odd on the one hand, and by the serious and valuable on the other, is well indicated in a sentence of G. K. Chesterton's in his book entitled *Orthodoxy*. "Death," he says there, "is more tragic than death by starvation." It is not the freakish death, it is not the odd death, that really matters; it is death itself. The affirmation applies to very many other things. For instance, marriage will always be more momentous than a duke's marrying a flower girl. Chesterton's statement sums up a whole point of view. Somehow or other, it is this point of view that we must make our own if we are to read for profit.

Regarding what is required of us ourselves, it is hardly within my power in this place to say anything more definite or more directly helpful. But I may point out that, provided it is undertaken in the right spirit, in the appropriate frame of mind—and of that I shall have something to say presently—our reading can assist us in acquiring the serious outlook. This outlook we should not expect to find ourselves in possession of as the result of any sudden transformation, although the first step we take towards possessing it may be sudden enough. That first step may take place as the result of our reading a book. It may even take place as the result of our coming across a single sentence; for instance, the sentence of Chesterton's which I quoted just now, that "death is more tragic than death by starvation." Once we truly grasp the import of a simple, unassuming, but fundamental affirmation such as that, we are already launched on the road to being able to read for profit—that is to say, to being able to read with profit.

Thus our reading can assist our reading. But, as I say, in order so to assist itself, our reading needs to be undertaken in the right spirit. And that brings me to another of the requirements that have to be met if our reading is

to affect us and to influence our life beyond the moments during which our gaze rests on the printed page.

It is requisite that we should in some measure come to possess ourselves of the spirit of literature.

It is requisite that we should feel the reality of the literature of the past, that we should feel the literature of the past as a living force. If I can say little that can be directly helpful regarding what is required of us ourselves in order that we should read for profit, on the other hand, regarding how we may come to feel the enduring power of the literature of the past and regarding what it is that accounts for that enduring power, there are quite a few things that these lectures should be able to say. Indeed, I feel that to help us to feel the literature of the past as a living force can and should be the greater part of their object. The question arises: How can the lectures do this best? Various possibilities suggest themselves.

It might seem—to take one such possibility—that what will serve us best would be a miniature bird's eye view of the past. Whenever we are confronted with some new subject, some unfamiliar domain of study, we incline instinctively to obtain first of all a survey of it. We feel, naturally enough, that if only we can fix in our minds some main headings, a few clear landmarks, we shall more readily find our way about the domain which we propose to explore and shall more quickly make ourselves at home in the new subject. On finding ourselves confronted with a domain so vast, with a subject so inexhaustible, as English literature, it is tempting to suppose that the most helpful step we can take first is to find out something of its history. Let us once get clear the general course which English literature has followed down the centuries, let us once get this course neatly blocked out in periods, let us see the different periods producing, and being connected by, influences and tendencies; and it will at once seem—we are inclined to suppose—that we shall possess the clear landmarks, the main headings, which we feel we need. Thereupon, surely, the literature of the past will have become real to us. And

it is the more tempting to suppose that the miniature bird's eye view is exactly what we want, that, from compact handbooks like *English Literature: Modern*, by the late G. H. Mair in the Home University Library, all the way up to the monumental *Cambridge History of English Literature*, in fifteen large volumes, there lies available to us to-day a profusion of books which treat literature historically.

That is one possibility. Another is that these lectures should form a commentary on certain anthologies. In their way anthologies trace the evolution of literature. They offer an opportunity of examining, if only superficially, the styles of a great many diverse writers, and of those styles they can claim to display the most striking characteristics. They enable us, that is to say, to see changes taking place in style from writer to writer as those changes actually took place in the past. And here again it would be the more tempting for me to content myself with referring you to certain anthologies in order to enable you to feel the reality of the English literature of the past, that, beginning with *The Golden Treasury*, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, *The Pageant of English Prose*, and *The Oxford Book of English Prose*, there exist at present plenty of anthologies to choose from. Anthologies, indeed, are now in fashion. Especially for poetry, we may find one for any particular period we care to study, or for any particular kind of poetry. There is, for example, an anthology of seventeenth century verse, there is an anthology of English religious verse, and so on.

Yet a third possibility suggests itself, and at first sight it looks like being the most attractive of all. I mean, that it might seem that my best way of trying to make us alive, or more alive, to the existence of the treasures of English literature would be to say something about some of the great writers to whom we owe the treasures. About our great English writers themselves we have a mass of information, and it is information full of human interest. We have details of their mannerisms and eccentricities. Here, for

instance, is Macaulay's catalogue of the mannerisms and other peculiarities of Dr. Johnson:

> His scrofula, his St. Vitus's dance, his rolling walk, his blinking eye; his insatiable appetite for fish sauce and veal pie with plums, his inextinguishable thirst for tea, his trick of touching the posts as he walked, his mysterious practice of treasuring scraps of orange peel, . . . his contortions, his mutterings, his gruntings, his puffings.

Macaulay speaks also of "the outward signs which too clearly marked his [Johnson's] approbation of his dinner"; and elsewhere mentions, with "his constant rudeness" and "his strange abstinence," his "equally strange voracity." "He could fast," Macaulay says; "but when he did not fast, he tore his dinner like a famished wolf, with the veins swelling on his forehead, and the perspiration running down his cheeks." This description is at least as instructive concerning Macaulay himself as it is concerning Dr. Johnson. Macaulay rather implies that if we had been able to meet Dr. Johnson in the flesh, we would have noticed all these mannerisms and peculiarities at once—that they were, in a sense, the whole of the outward man. But any reader of Boswell knows that this is not so. At the beginning of the *Journal of a Tour in the Hebrides* Boswell devotes a paragraph to Dr. Johnson's mannerisms They are there much less formidable than Macaulay makes them out to be. Macaulay's catalogue brings too much together, and so is caricature. Unfair as it may be to Johnson in particular, however, it yet serves to emphasize for us, regarding our great writers in general, how certain among them have been eccentric, moody, or queer. In this no doubt they were the more truly human, and a lecture which discussed a few of them in that aspect would be assuredly popular.

Great authors have had vices and weaknesses. The fascinating *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) show that in literature vice may lose all its grossness. Not so in real life. The author of the *Confessions* was of course Thomas De Quincey. Another writer who took opium

was Coleridge. Coleridge spent on opium a weekly sum of money he could ill afford; and it has been contended that the habit, operating upon his temperament, was his ruin as a poet, a philosopher, and a critic. In real life vice remains a formidable enemy to high endeavour.

Great authors have made money. Anthony Trollope, in his *Autobiography*, discloses the amount of his earnings as a novelist. In the course of his life his pen brought him £70,000. Great authors have had financial troubles. The circumstances in which Sir Walter Scott suddenly found himself in debt to the tune of £140,000 have become legendary. Leigh Hunt, in his way a remarkable author, was dogged by financial difficulties, although it was not for debt, but for what was adjudged to be a libel on the Regent —the future George IV—that he spent two years in prison. Destitution drove the gifted young poet Chatterton to suicide. The weaknesses and misfortunes of great writers —there again is a subject that would be likely to attract listeners.

Some authors have not hesitated to tamper with fact in order to set their own skill or their own conduct before the public in what they considered to be the most favourable light. A peculiarly curious instance is afforded by Alexander Pope, who was indeed a most disingenuous, malignant, tortuous, and altogether extraordinary character. Pope would dip his pen in gall in order to sear those persons whom he imagined to be, or whom he had actually turned into, his enemies. He would victimize his friends. He thought it nothing to disturb an old serving woman two or three times in the course of a bitter winter's night, so that he might not lose the thoughts which had come to him. Yet he was also capable of being anxious that his mother should not be given a moment's distress. If Pope tampered with fact, other writers have attempted the boldest frauds. Chatterton, whom I named just now, offered the world what purported to be medieval poems but were really his own manufacture. It is the most notorious fraud in the annals of English letters. Another

was James Macpherson's so-called translation of the poems of Ossian. He did not really translate from the Gaelic; he selected and adapted. The first person who refused to accept Macpherson's work at its face value was the forthright Dr. Johnson. A lecture on literary frauds and the disingenuousness of certain great writers—that again, surely, would be full of interest.

Or, if we turn from these curiosities of the career of authorship, as they may be labelled, to the individual lives of writers, at once a wide prospect opens before us. The lives of some great writers have been highly eventful. Others have had careers which were simply astounding. The life of Daniel Defoe, for example, was a life crammed with incident. To me it seems a life far more romantic and fabulous than that of either his entirely fictitious heroine Moll Flanders or his largely fictitious hero Robinson Crusoe. Or consider the career of Charles Dickens. Put to work as a boy filling and labelling pots of blacking, he was yet to become at the age of twenty-three a professional writer, and soon he was beginning to produce that matchless series of character-portraits which have made him the favourite English novelist, so that he is still to-day the most widely read. No writer's life has been richer in the pleasant surprise, no writer's success has brought more in its train, than the life and success of Dickens.

But for that matter the history of English literature abounds in records of lives made up of unusual events, lives which all who are curious about human life are likely to find absorbingly instructive and illuminating. The poet Keats was very nearly a youthful prodigy: his poetic genius became unmistakable while he was yet hardly more than a boy. There is the meteoric rise of Byron, who one night went to bed unknown and awoke next morning to find himself famous.

To mention Byron is to be reminded that Byron the man, as distinct from the poet, is a figure perennially fascinating. He provided the young and well-to-do and imaginative in Western Europe with a new mode of self-dramatization.

This was known on the Continent as Byronism, and its vogue ran through the twenties and thirties of the nineteenth century. Everybody knows that Byron, while still a comparatively young man, died at a small port on the northern shore of the Gulf of Patras called Missolonghi. He had gone there in order to place his person and his fortune at the service of the Greeks, whose bid for independence from the Turks was at that time giving promise of success. That his life should have ended thus, after he had passed long years of exile in Italy, has thrown over his memory a permanent halo. He is immortal, not only as a poet, but also as a hero of one of the great struggles for national freedom. Latterly, however, it is his disastrous marriage and his numerous love affairs that have come, more and more, to form the centre of the intense interest which he inspires. There is indeed no doubt that if the figures of several great writers of the past have so strong a hold on the popular imagination, it is because of what is known, and of what is surmised, concerning those writers' relations with women.

The play and also the film entitled *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* are still sufficiently fresh in the memories of many of us for us to be aware that the wooing of Elizabeth Barrett by the poet Browning and their subsequent marriage—the marriage of two gifted poets—are two events which together form the quintessence of romance. Authors have not always been so fortunate, of course. Thackeray's marriage proved as sad as Browning's was happy. The story of Shelley's first marriage leaves us with a sense of the inhuman and the horrible. Harriet Westbrook, with whom he went through a form of marriage when she was sixteen, killed herself five years later in harrowing circumstances. Of few poets is the popular portrait more staid and blameless than that of Wordsworth. Yet even Wordsworth, in middle life and old age the personification of respectability, is now known to have been an eager lover in his youth. He passed about a year in France during the French Revolution, and it was then that he wooed and won

a young woman who bore him a child. The loves of great writers—surely there, it might be thought, we have the very theme that when properly treated would enable us to feel the reality of the literature of the past!

Nor need I stop at summarizing for you a few of those love affairs. There is open to us also the field of psychological theory. That youthful affair of Wordsworth's, which I have just alluded to—that, for instance, serves as the foundation of a piece of psychological theorizing. Wordsworth lived to a great age, but it is generally agreed that he wrote all his best poetry during a comparatively short period of his long life—a period of about eight years while he was still young. The theory I have just mentioned, which is put forward by Mr. Herbert Read, seeks to explain how this happened. The affair with the French girl, Annette Vallon, occurred some years before his inspiration reached its summit, and Mr. Read has suggested that it was while the memory of Annette still suffused Wordsworth's spirit with a glow of enthusiasm that his muse made him eloquent, and that if presently Wordsworth ceased to be so happily inspired it was because by then he had grown ashamed, or at least repentant, of his youthful indiscretion, and his heart had turned to ashes. According to Mr. Read, Wordsworth's reason told him that the recollection of the French girl must be obliterated from his mind and feelings, and he resolutely set himself to forget her. But it was only at the price of quenching the fires within him that he succeeded in doing so. Thereupon, though he went on composing verse, he could no longer make it living verse. That is Mr. Read's theory. And it is but one of a number of psychological theories about great writers which the popularity of psychology has recently tempted ingenious persons to work out and put before the world. In those theories, or at least in a selection of them, we again have a subject which seems to recommend itself for these lectures.

Altogether it looks as if my only difficulty would be to decide what from among such a wealth of competing material I ought to choose. Should I talk to you about

the mannerisms and eccentricities of great writers, about their vices, about the riches of some and the poverty of others, of literary frauds and impostures ; or should I talk to you about the eventful and adventurous lives of certain authors, and about the way in which some wrested success from the world in spite of unpropitious beginnings ? Or, again, should these lectures deal with the love affairs of certain great writers ? Or, finally, should they deal with some of the psychological theories that have been advanced within recent years to account for this or that great author's having written as he did and what he did ? Those are our choices.

And, undeniably, they are all attractive. Before we commit ourselves, however, let us see how far any one of them would serve our purpose. It is the intention of these lectures, I have said, to assist us to read for profit. In order that we may win the profit it is requisite, I have also said, that we should come in some measure to possess ourselves of the spirit of literature, that we should have a sense of the literature of the past and feel it as a living force. Hence we may first ask ourselves if my trying to give you a smattering of the history of English literature would result in your possessing that spirit and would lead you to have this sense and feeling. I am afraid it would not. It would in no way achieve this to have English literature neatly sectioned off in our heads into periods. Nor would it help us for me to tell you something of so-called influences and tendencies. Likewise, it would be no good my referring you to a selection of anthologies. And by the same token it would be equally sterile for me to tell you about the eventful lives of certain great authors, or about the mannerisms, eccentricities, riches, or poverty of great authors, about their frauds or their love affairs ; nor would it help us for me to give you an account of psychological theories that have been elaborated in order to account for this or that author's having written as he did and what he did.

The reason why nothing of all that would really serve is that what we need to come to grips with is literature itself,

and literature is not its history, nor "periods," "tendencies," or " influences " ; literature is neither external events in the life of an author nor internal events which psychological theory may attribute to a writer: literature consists entirely of pieces of writing, and it is solely in pieces of writing that literature exists. If then it is required of us, in order to read for profit, that we should feel and understand the literature of the past as a living force, it is to literature itself that we must address ourselves ; it is to some of those individual pieces of writing which together constitute literature that we must go.

We cannot rely on anthologies. Against anthologies in their place I of course have nothing to say. Anthologies may be of use to apprentice writers in that they are miniature source-books of style. Anthologies may be of use to the young, to whom they will give a foretaste of writings which the young may expect to come upon entire later in their reading. Anthologies may be of advantage to the sailor, the soldier, or the traveller, in that they will often provide him with his favourite short poems in a compact and handy form. But when our aim is to come to feel and to understand something of literature—that is to say, to come to feel and to understand something of a selection of individual works—then anthologies are useless. Generally speaking, it is only anthologies of poetry that contain any pieces of writing complete, and then only short poems. Most anthologies are made up of fragments—either fragments of works or else fragments of the work of various writers. And fragments, or, for that matter, complete short poems, are not what we now want. If we are going to address ourselves to some of the pieces of writing that constitute literature in order to come to feel and to understand the literature of the past as a living force, we need to take pieces of writing of a certain length and we need to have them before us entire.

Again, we cannot rely either upon certain biographies of writers or on psychological theories about particular authors. In order to read for profit, our business is to

read and then to notice what happens to us. The important thing, the main thing, about reading is its effect upon us; and for this the information contained in biographies is largely if not wholly irrelevant. And wholly irrelevant are psychological theories. No doubt we are all instinctively curious—or rather inquisitive—concerning the lives of other people, and especially when we fancy, or have reason to suppose, that those lives have been excitingly eventful. The love affairs of a writer seem, because he is a writer, to be somehow more thrilling than the love affairs of a financier or a grocer. It is therefore hardly surprising that we should take pleasure in reading either accounts of the external events in some celebrated author's life or else accounts of the internal and emotional adventures which, years after he is dead, an ingenious theorist ascribes to him. And so long as we do not imagine that we are thereby getting to know how that particular author matters for literature, so long as we are aware of reading for pleasure and in order to indulge our inquisitiveness, little or no harm can result. In a sense unconnected with the author's works, we may even be reading for profit. Sometimes a biography is a fine piece of literature, and in a subsequent lecture I shall have something to say about the profitableness of reading biographies. If, however, when reading the account of an author's life, and especially when reading about some psychological theory concerning an author, we fancy that we are being helped the better to understand the place of that author's writings in literature, or how they come to be literature, we deceive ourselves. Who a particular author was, how he behaved, whom he loved, what he felt—none of that is then information of any use to us.

Let us suppose one piece of writing we decide to read is a poem. The only thing that is going to matter for us is, I repeat, the effect which the reading has upon us. How the poet came to write it—that is a psychological and not a literary question. Whether or not the poet was impelled to write the poem through having undergone some definite

emotion—through having been, for instance, in love—is utterly immaterial. Quite possibly, the actual writing of the poem may have occurred in a condition the reverse of emotional: that fact likewise is no concern of ours. Especially when we are considering poetry, we are apt to suppose that the poet is somehow communicating to us his own emotion; and certain poets, it is true, have made statements supporting this view. But others have said just the opposite. Wordsworth's saying that "poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" has come to be accepted as meaning that a poem is the communication of some emotion *felt by its* author. In reality, however, not even all poems originate in this way. Wordsworth was in one respect a peculiar poet. He could find the material for his poetry only in his own emotional experience. That is why Keats called his kind of poetry "the egotistical sublime." It by no means follows that all poets have confined themselves to such material, or indeed that when we read a poem by Wordsworth we are having communicated to us some emotion which Wordsworth himself had undergone. In the urge to artistic production there may be traced two distinct impulses. One, possibly the more primitive of the two, is the impulse to make something, an impulse which has thus come to pass for a desire to express, to communicate. The other, equally powerful and equally effectual, is the impulse to evoke a response from a spectator, auditor, or reader—that is to say, an impulse to play on the feelings of other people. It is alone with this second impulse that the reader of literature is concerned. Yet critics of a certain kind constantly speak and write as if they thought otherwise—as if the first impulse existed alone and needed to be studied in operation. Such critics tend to pay too much unreflecting respect to *obiter dicta* such as that of Milton's, that the poet "ought himself to be a true poem," and not enough to statements such as that of Keats's, that "the poet is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures." When Wordsworth speaks of "emotion remembered in tranquillity," he is referring to

what seemed to him to be the material of his early lyric poems, to what this material had been for him, and for him alone; he is not referring to what a poem is from the standpoint of its reader. It is not a matter of opinion, but an obvious matter of fact, that there is behind the production of a poem, whether the poet is aware of it or not, the impulse to arouse emotion in us who read the poem; and, because this effect upon us is achieved by means of words, what the poet himself may have felt, what may have happened to him, and what his material was, are no concern of ours as readers—no concern whatsoever.

Indeed, if a poet while in the very act of composition has felt anything like what he seeks to make us feel, he is likely to fail in moving us. In this respect the poet may be compared with the actor. It has often been supposed—it has often been said, that an actor should think himself into his part, and in order to act most convincingly should forget for the time being that he is not the man he impersonates. That, however, is no more than a popular delusion. It has been effectively dispelled by the great French actor Coquelin, in his book on the art of acting. In that book Coquelin tells the following anecdote.

Another great actor, Edwin Booth, was once taking the chief part in the play *Le Roi s'amuse* (I forget the title of the English version in which Booth appeared, and, after all, what the play was is of no consequence). The part was one in which Booth was conscious of having won great success. One evening he satisfied himself that he was acting even better than usual. The power of the situations, the pathos of his lines, worked on him so strongly that he completely identified himself with the character he was representing. Real tears flowed from his eyes, his voice broke with emotion, real sobs choked him. Altogether, it seemed to him that he had never acted so well. The performance over, he saw his daughter hastening towards him. She, his most sincere and trustworthy critic, had been watching the stage from a box, and she was now anxious

to inquire what was the matter and how it happened that that night he had acted so badly.

Coquelin does not tell this little story for its own sake. His object is to point a moral. In his own words, the moral is that in order to call forth feeling in others we ourselves must not experience it. He does not say that we must never have known it, but only that we must not be undergoing it while we are in the act of trying to arouse it in others. "In all circumstances the actor," he says, "must retain complete self-control."

What is thus true of the actor is likewise true of every artist. No artist can hope to succeed in his job if he tries to force the response of his spectator, his auditor, or his reader, by putting the latter in contact with a direct response of his own. Thus it is that the business of the poet is himself to remain impassive while he is intent on utilizing every means at his disposal for moving his reader. In order to arouse emotion in others, the poet himself must in all circumstances retain complete self-control. That is why it is that when we are in the process of enjoying and appreciating a poem all particulars regarding the poet must be irrelevant. They can only distract and confuse us. Even where it happens that what has impelled a poet to write is an emotion which he himself has undergone—as with Wordsworth—knowledge that this emotion has been experienced by him will in no way assist us in the appreciation of his work. I hope that makes it quite clear that we cannot equip ourselves to win profit as we read by gleaning biographical or psychological information about great writers. We have got to go to literature itself; that is to say, to individual pieces of writing.

In order to read for profit, we may make for ourselves five rough and ready rules, or guiding principles; and this is the first of them: that, needing in the first place some acquaintance with the literature of the past, some consciousness of how the literature of the past is a living force, we should seek that acquaintance and consciousness from literature itself—not from histories of literature, not from

anthologies, not from biographies or psychological theories concerning great writers, but from actual pieces of writing.

That is the first rule. And here is the second. Let us go to those actual pieces of writing which are a part of literature in an appropriate spirit of humility. In behalf of this second rule, here is a short quotation:

> The reading of all the good books is like having a conversation with the highly worthy persons of the past who wrote them; indeed, it is like having a prepared conversation in which those persons disclose to us only their best thinking.

These words—which remind us of Milton's expression "the precious life-blood of a master spirit"—occur in the famous *Discourse on Method* of the great French philosopher Descartes. Very likely, for all I know, Arnold Bennett the novelist never came across them. Yet it is he who happens to have expounded them and to have drawn out their implication. Here is how he does so. He says that if you knew you were about to have an interview with *some* great man, and especially with one reputed for his wisdom, you would not dream of neglecting to prepare yourself for the occasion. Moreover, during the actual conversation, when it took place, you would hang on the great man's lips and would carry away with you from it the indelible memory of his every word. It is, Arnold Bennett continues, in exactly the same way that you *should* approach a work of literature. A work of literature *should* be *read* in the same subdued spirit, with the same careful attention. With these words of Arnold Bennett's, reflection, I am sure, can only lead us fully to agree. We should never open a good book expecting it to conform to *our favourite* prepossessions and in readiness to reject it as soon as we find that it fails to do so. An Extension lecturer remarked the other day that his pupils were only too ready to be prejudiced against any particular piece of literature, and that in order to make them like it he had, as he put it, to spring it upon them. That attitude of, as it were, wanting to be prejudiced may seem very smart, but I should not need to say that it is utterly self-stultifying. And it is not the only attitude

to writing that is so. Too many people nowadays—among them clergymen, doctors, and, I am afraid, regular soldiers —are inclined to imagine that no piece of writing can have its *raison d'être* except in something extraneous to itself. They tend to imagine that writers are in the world solely in order to be made use of and that all writing is to be treated as being in some sense propaganda. This is hopelessly misguided and self-defeating. Literature, and in fact not only acknowledged literature but all writing, is, in so far as it is itself, autonomous. Only thanks to its autonomy can it embrace, as it does, the whole of life and of human experience. The condition of its reaching out so widely is that it is free. No doubt there is plenty of writing for ends avowedly extra-literary. But from the standpoint of literature, from the standpoint of writing, those ends must always be secondary. It is the literary intention that we need always to consider first and foremost. Let us always ask ourselves, not what axe has the author had to grind, but what intention—what literary intention, has guided him; what effect—what literary effect, has he wanted to produce. We cannot ask ourselves this regarding a particular piece of writing, and still more we cannot obtain any answer, if we ask condescendingly and in a spirit of patronage. Whenever we are condescending or patronizing towards a poem or a novel, we can never enjoy it as it is meant to be enjoyed; we can never understand it to our best advantage. Therefore, let us always open a good book bearing in mind that we have come into the presence of one of our betters.

That is our second rule. I come to our third. It is: Let us read nothing that bores us. It should go without saying that if we are going to read deliberately for the sake of the profit which we may derive from our reading, we shall need to find the reading pleasurable. One reason for this is that the acquaintance with literature which we shall be pursuing is simply a consciousness and an understanding of our enjoyment of literature. But another and equally important reason is that for nobody can acquiring the

acquaintance be easy. The acquisition can be neither e[illegible] nor brief. The number of works of literature which a[illegible] of us need select to read and to think over in order to find himself reading with profit is doubtless small in proportion to the whole mass of literature. It is large in proportion to any individual reader's powers of assimilation. They are works which require not only to be read, but to be read again. The greater their quality and the more *solid* the substance, the closer the attention which they exact. We need to read with all the alertness and concentration of which we are capable. It follows that to get to know anything of literature must require an effort on our part and that it must require time. And because both time and effort are demanded of us, we shall certainly do well to stop reading anything that we do not enjoy—to stop reading anything by which we find ourselves bored. For that would be to discourage our efforts just where, in order to succeed, they need to be sustained. Whenever we find ourselves in danger of being bored by some book or other piece of writing, I suggest we put it aside, no matter how tremendous the reputation it has in the world. Let us always remember that neither can we read, nor is there any call upon us to read, all the masterpieces in our tongue. If, however, the work by which we have been in danger of being bored is one which we feel we ought not to neglect, we can always return to it at some later date. Let us allow ourselves an interval in which our literary sympathies may be widened and deepened, our palate for reading made more appreciative of the unusual ; and then, when we open the book again, it is quite likely that we shall find—possibly to our surprise—that it now holds us absorbed. Had we in the first place, in spite of the absence of pleasure, persevered with the reading of it, we might have come to dislike it irretrievably. Now, on the contrary, and thanks to the delay, it has won us over. The more we feel in advance that the book is one we should attend to, the more important it is for us that this should happen. For it is only the reading we enjoy that can be counted upon to

affect and influence us durably. It is only from the reading we enjoy that we can expect to obtain profit. For, as I said just now, to be acquainted with literature is simply to be conscious of, and to understand, our enjoyment of it. That is why I offer as our third rule : Let us read nothing that bores us.

Our fourth rule is : Let us organize our reading. It is a rule on the importance of which I cannot insist too strongly. The trouble with people who read a lot is that, as often as not, their reading is promiscuous, haphazard, confused. The other day a brother-officer showed me three books which he had received from England. They were : a volume of literary criticism by Mr. Middleton Murry, a survey of life in England under Queen Anne extracted from Professor G. M. Trevelyan's historical trilogy *Blenheim*, and *Adventures Before Thirty* by Algernon Blackwood. The three books, you see, were quite unconnected with one another, and none taken singly led on to anything else. The consequence of indiscriminate reading after this fashion can only be confusion. Yet the three titles in juxtaposition is typical of how people jumble their reading. Many readers see nothing out of the ordinary in going on from, say, Dr. Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* to Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence*, then to Eric Knight's novel, *This Above All*, then to some piece of scientific popularization or work of elementary economics, after which they will pick up Arthur Bryant's *The Years of Endurance*. When that is how we compile our reading lists, it is not surprising that we do not distinguish any difference of quality between *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis and *The Uniqueness of Man* by Julian Huxley, between *I Am Persuaded* by Julian Duguid and Eric Gill's *Autobiography*, between *The Keys of the Kingdom* by A. J. Cronin and Sir Charles Sherrington's Gifford Lectures. As a consequence, our whole attitude to books is bound to be one of puzzled goodwill.

I know I dwelt a few moments ago on the necessity of not reading anything that bores us, and I know it may be urged

that variety in our reading helps to avoid the danger of boredom and seems to ensure that our reading shall always be pleasurable. I know. I know that the expression "organized reading" has a forbidding sound. I know that it suggests turning our reading, which normally must be done in our leisure and which we like to think of as relaxation, into a task. I know that we English are inherently distrustful of system. Nevertheless, when all that is taken into account, it does not make it any the less regrettable that so many people should allow their reading to become a muddle. What can be the advantage or the satisfaction of mixing up our reading of economics, fiction, psychology, history, biography, travel, and theology, so that the result is complete confusion? At best it can only mean that we overtax our minds. Probably the most versatile and comprehensive brain known to European history is Leonardo da Vinci's; but not even he, we may be sure, would have been able to read as so many people read to-day and yet have made head or tail of what he read. At worst we shall get to the stage of reading with complete passivity. What we read will cease to impress itself upon us, and we shall carry away from it not even likes and dislikes.

So it is that, as I say, our reading needs to be organized. In the first place, let us be sure that we read the capital books themselves and do not remain content to take them on hearsay. Let us not, as so many people do nowadays, read books about, say, Byron without having first read Byron's correspondence. Let us not, as so many people do nowadays, read books about the reign of Charles II without having first read the *Diaries* of Pepys and of Evelyn. Let us not, as so many people do nowadays, read biographies of Queen Victoria or of Keats without having first read the *Letters* of Queen Victoria or the *Letters* of Keats. Let us read Lady Blessington's *Diary* before we read books about Lady Blessington. Let us read the *Confessions* of St. Augustine before we read books about St. Augustine. Let us read Plato's Socratic dialogues before we read a biography of Socrates. Let us read Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson* before

we read Macaulay or Leslie Stephen on Dr. Johnson. In short, let us follow the advice of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and read masterpieces instead of frittering away our time on books written about and around masterpieces.

In the second place, in organizing our reading, let us strive to make it coherent. I mean, the reading by which we set store, not the reading in which we may engage merely in order to while away an hour or two. After we have read, say, some notable novel, let us go on to read, not just any other novel, but a novel related to it, either one by the same author or one with a similarity of theme or treatment. I do not mean necessarily a novel contemporary with it. I do not mean anything to do with "influences" or "tendencies." For instance, the early social novels of H. G. Wells—*Kipps, Love and Mr. Lewisham, The History of Mr. Polly*—probably have their most illuminating analogues in certain novels by Dickens—*Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield.* Again, suppose we read some famous long poem; suppose we read Byron's *Don Juan*, it will then be to organize our reading if after finishing the poem we go on to ascertain what opinions have been expressed concerning it, if we look into the conditions in which it came to be written, if we find out why Byron was hostile to Southey, why he takes of English society and of English politics the view which is exhibited in *Don Juan.*

A little earlier I was at pains to insist that neither biographical information nor psychological theories about an author are of any help to the enjoyment and appreciation of his work. Of course I am not now going back on that. I am now speaking of something else. Information about the conditions in which a piece of literature was produced, about its setting as we may call it, and about the public events of its time—that information may often be of great value to the reader—the reader in quest of profit, that is. Sometimes this information proves to be indispensable to an understanding, and therefore to any enjoyment, of a particular piece of literature. Without it, allusions, and

sometimes the whole import, will remain unintelligible. For example, those plays of Shakespeare's which are called histories—*King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richard III*—are quite unintelligible unless we know something of English history during the period they deal with. If it remains that details of the private life of Shakespeare bear in no way on the effect which a work of his is to have upon us, we may nevertheless lay down that if before we read a particular piece of literature we find out in what conditions it was produced, and what was its setting, and also that if after we have read a particular piece of literature we look up the eminent opinions of it that have been expressed, we shall help to make our reading profitable. And in doing this we shall be organizing our reading.

Finally, to organize our reading should further mean that as early as possible we read—or re-read—a number of works of literature of the past. I quoted just now Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch where he bids us read masterpieces instead of frittering away our time on books written about and around masterpieces. He urges us to read masterpieces, because of course they are the best reading, the reading that is most sure to be reading for profit. But we should read masterpieces also because the reading of them will assist us in what Pope calls the formation of judgement and taste. Whenever we read some notable piece of literature of the past, we can not only notice the effect which our reading has upon us; we can go on as well to compare our own impressions with those of a variety of critical experts. The comparison will help us to understand why the work in question is a masterpiece, it will draw our attention to things we may have overlooked in it, it will help us to revise and no doubt to better our first impressions, and it will send us back to the work equipped to enjoy and to appreciate it in the re-reading more deeply and thoroughly. In this way, and in this way alone, can we hope to come to understand and to feel what literature really is. And thus gradually we shall reach the stage at which we can spontaneously apply our fifth and last rule.

This is: Let us learn to distinguish bad writing from good, and not only to recognize good writing whenever we come upon it, but also to recognize writing that is better. In other words, let us learn to distinguish whatever is not literature from the real thing; let us learn to recognize the best literature. The importance of this rule in reading for profit cannot be over-emphasized. I do not need to tell you that, although literature consists entirely of pieces of writing and only exists in pieces of writing, every piece of writing is not literature. And it is only by reading and re-reading pieces of writing that are literature that we can safely expect to read for profit. Pieces of writing which are not literature may often yield us information, and the information may be needed in our studies or profession. Pieces of writing which are not literature may influence us, when we read them merely to pass the time; as I have already said, they may influence us without our being aware of it. But it is literature alone that we may be sure of reading with profit in that sense of the word "profit" of which I have been talking, provided, of course, we are capable of gathering this profit. It is therefore imperative that we should be able to distinguish whatever is not literature from the real thing. And the reading of notable pieces of literature of the past is what, as much as anything, will render us capable of drawing the distinction. And further, it is the best literature that will give us, with the highest pleasure, the greatest profit.

There, then, are our five rough and ready rules or guiding principles to be observed in order to read for profit. I will repeat them. First, in order to acquire some acquaintance with the literature of the past, let us go, not to histories of literature, nor to anthologies, nor to biographies of authors, nor to psychological theories concerning authors, but to actual pieces of writing—to a selection of the pieces of writing that together make up literature. Secondly, let us go to these actual pieces of writing in an appropriate spirit of humility, with an appropriate receptiveness, in simplicity of heart. Thirdly,

let us never persist in reading anything that bores us. Fourthly, let us organize our reading; which means, in part, let us observe some order in our reading, and, in part, let us read masterpieces. Fifthly and lastly, let us learn to distinguish whatever is not literature from the real thing.

Among these rules the reading of masterpieces and the learning to distinguish whatever is not literature from the real thing may be described as the capital investment required of us in order that we shall read for profit. It is in the making of that capital investment that I think people are most likely to need guidance, and in that direction guidance is what perhaps these lectures can offer.

Next week we shall consider novels, and at the same time as I shall offer you a wide range of novels by dead authors from which to choose the ones you may care to read or to read again, I shall dwell on three novels in particular in order that we may see how they fail or how they succeed in displaying what you will allow me to call the symptoms of literature. That is to say, we shall be specially concerned with the business of distinguishing what is not literature from the real thing. Later on we shall in the same way discuss bad and good biography. And so we shall review in turn all the main kinds of literature. But we shall not invariably oppose literature and non-literature. It would not be practical to attempt to do so. Regarding history, for example, I shall content myself with mentioning that although there are various kinds of history, to-day only one kind is really suited to the general reader. I shall say something of the limitations of present-day scientific writing for popular consumption—scientific popularization, as it is called—but on coming to political writings, to folk-lore, and to religious writings, I shall confine myself to speaking of certain works that demand to be read. I shall devote one lecture to the subject of prose style, and then I shall consider how plays in prose may be literature. Having thus begun on the drama, I shall go on to plays in verse. I shall try to show wherein the greatness of poetic drama lies. From this, I shall pass to poetry in general,

and at that point I shall aim at making clear the essence of poetry. Finally, I shall have a shot at removing the difficulties which numbers of people seem to meet with when they wish to read the "new" poetry, the "new" poetry of the last thirty to thirty-five years.

Such, very briefly, is our programme. My aim throughout will be, I repeat, to help us to equip ourselves to read for profit—on the one hand, by recommending masterpieces and other important books for us to read; on the other hand, by pointing out wherever appropriate how we may recognize both literature and its counterfeit.

SECOND LECTURE

NOVELS

WE can be confident that a piece of writing which is indisputably literature will give us the opportunity of reading for profit. That pieces of writing which are not literature offer this opportunity is less certain. They can offer it only negatively. So if we are seeking profit from our reading, it is desirable, as you may remember my saying last week, that we should be able to distinguish whatever is not literature from the real thing. The ability is hardly one to be taught. But I think there is something that can be pointed out. I would not go so far as to speak of a method, of a form of procedure, or even of a recipe. But there are what may be called the symptoms of literature. How does literature manifest itself? To answer, or to sketch an answer to, that question is our business this evening.

Much can be said for taking our first examples from novels. To-day the novel is the most popular form of general reading. I may speak of novels in the secure knowledge that everybody will understand what I am talking about. Moreover, if the symptoms of literature, as I call them, are discernible anywhere, novels should display both their presence and their absence conspicuously. For some of the finest pieces of literature in English are novels, and yet most novels—above all, most novels being published at the present day—are not literature.

Now one way in which we might learn to recognize the symptoms of literature in novels would be for us to read a number of novels whose title to be literature has been put beyond dispute. The best of such novels are called classics. A classic is a piece of literature of recognized excellence. The excellence only becomes assured in perspective, and perspective implies some remoteness. In other words, we

may assume that the author of any classic is dead. I have drawn up a list of about ninety English novels which satisfy at least this condition of being classics.[1] Of not a single one of them is the author still alive. It is, I hope, an unpretentious list, and yet I think some virtues may be claimed for it. It comprises either the best or the most characteristic works of various novelists. For instance, it includes only three of Thackeray's novels and only three of Trollope's. Yet the three by Thackeray—*Vanity Fair, Pendennis, Esmond*—not only happen to be the only novels of Thackeray's which I myself have read; they are also those which older and no doubt better men declare to be the only ones that really matter. While the three by Trollope may bear unexpected titles—*The Claverings, Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite, Dr. Thorne*—they are the novels which Mr. Michael Sadleir, our chief authority on Trollope to-day, singles out as his most remarkable.

Of course nobody will require to read all the novels in the list in order to become able to detect the symptoms of literature. But possibly it would be as well to avoid selecting in it novels all of one period. And that desirability may well raise a difficulty. It would not occur to me to suggest that any one among you reads nothing but current novels. But there are people who do, and if one of those people were all at once to turn from the reading of current novels to a novel written, say, in the eighteenth century, he might find that eighteenth-century novel a little foreign; he might not enjoy it. What I think such a person should do, if he wants to take up reading the work of dead novelists when he has never done so before, is to begin with novels in my list that are not more than forty or fifty years old. A novel of that age does not, he will find, differ much from a novel of the present day. He will not find himself transplanted into an entirely foreign country, but into one still akin to his own. And, then, having first read some recent classics or recent potential classics, he may gradually read backwards in time. On this account I

[1] Cf. Appendix to this lecture, p. 60.

have usually appended to the title of each novel in my list the date of original publication.

I must not be taken to imply that the list contains enough to satisfy anybody's appetite for fiction during the rest of his life. In saying that one way of growing able to recognize the symptoms of literature is to read novels whose title to be literature has been put beyond dispute, I do not mean for a moment that reading for profit means reading only classics, or, for that matter, that we must always be reading for profit. I imagine we all pick on a particular novel to read according to our mood. There are moments when Emily Brontë promises to provide what we want, and other moments when either P. G. Wodehouse or Agatha Christie is more welcome. I do not say that P. G. Wodehouse and Agatha Christie are not literature. What I am anxious to emphasize is that, whatever the novel we have just finished, we should be aware *when* we have been reading literature and *when* we have not. The list of classics, or of potential classics, is there so that through reading such novels we may, if we wish, grow able to note the presence of the symptoms of literature. But it does not follow that the mere reading of a selection of those novels will result in our acquiring a quasi-automatic ability to recognize the symptoms in question. We might as well suppose that a medical student would be able infallibly to diagnose a particular disease from symptoms he had been told were there, but had not had described to him. Actually, the medical student would not know what to look for. And we should be in the same situation. We too would not know what to look for. Yet that quasi-automatic ability is, after all, what we really need.

So I feel I ought to try to show you the symptoms as they are present in some actual novel, and that I ought also to point to their absence from some actual novel. We do not want to spend much time over what is not literature or is only pseudo-literature. Nevertheless, we do need to get clear in our minds why so many pieces of writing are not literature. So this evening I propose to consider some

individual novels ; three novels—two of them by contemporaries, and the third by a writer who died in 1870.

I do not wish to prejudge the question whether or not any one of the three is literature. But I said just now that literature most novels being published to-day are certainly not. It is not because they are literature that a number of them go on selling. I do not believe it is realized outside literary circles how skilful the average novelist has now become. He can construct and tell a story far better than could the giants of the past. The successful novelist of to-day deserves his success. He is highly competent—more competent than Fielding, George Eliot, or Trollope. There is no clumsiness on his part like Mrs. Smith's story in Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion*. He leaves no loose ends as Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne do in *The Wrecker*. He can produce suspense and tension without that recourse to melodrama which Dickens seems to have found *indispensable*. Yet notwithstanding all his competence and notwithstanding how the older novelists fumbled, we remember their tales and his we forget. He attains his competence, that is to say, at the price of being superficial. That is why he is pleasant reading—once. Most successful novelists of to-day paint no pictures on walls of the mind that would otherwise remain bare. At best they leave on those walls an agreeable blur. They are not to be read for profit. I do not say we should do better not to read them. But I do say we should read them with our eyes open. Whoever would read for profit needs to understand that the successful contemporary novel usually owes its success to a skilful adjustment of interest to the very act of reading, so that once the reading is done the interest lapses.

I may now turn to the first of the three novels I propose we should consider in order to ascertain whether or not they display the symptoms of literature. But it seemed desirable, before we did so, to prepare ourselves to find that nowadays large sales are not a guarantee of literature.

Obviously it would be an advantage if each of you had recently read the novels of which I am going to speak ; and

not only had read them, but could also during the remainder of this hour isolate in his mind his recollections of them. That is asking too much. Accordingly, I have to assume that all three are unknown to you, or at best that your recollections of them are vague.

First, I take a recent novel by a deservedly popular writer —James Hilton's *Random Harvest*. I choose *Random Harvest* because it is in its way so good. I cannot avoid giving away the plot. If you have not read the novel, and this seems to spoil your prospective enjoyment of it, supposing you now decide to read it for the first time, remember that after you have heard what I am going to say you will be reading for your enlightenment as much as for your pleasure. I may remark too that when I myself read the novel, I was already aware of its plot; yet I do not think the awareness lessened my enjoyment in the reading.

Random Harvest, then, is the story of a man named Charles Rainier with a chunk of time missing out of his life. During the last war he is blown up in a trench in France and loses his memory. He recovers it in December, 1919, and he then finds that he is oblivious to everything that may have happened to him in the interval. Yet in the course of the ensuing years vague half-reminiscences haunt him. He is the son of a big steel manufacturer. His father dies, and he takes over the management of the business. He goes into Parliament. He is regarded as a highly successful man. But all the while he is dimly aware of wanting something—something that is missing. He becomes engaged to a girl, a kind of half-relation, and then the girl breaks off the engagement inexplicably. We see later that it is because she feels that his heart is buried in his missing past. He marries his secretary. At last, in 1939, he chances to see the performance of a last-war play, and the spectacle brings the lost chunk of his life back into his consciousness. Early in 1919 he had escaped from an asylum near London. An actress named Paula Ridgway befriended him. She was touring in this very play. He called himself Smith. They ran away and were married

Now, twenty years later, he suddenly recalls all this in a swift flooding of consciousness. And thereupon he has but one desire—to find Paula, his true wife. To do so proves far easier than even he can suppose. For Paula and the secretary he has married in his real name and in his real identity of Rainier are one and the same woman.

This bald summary does *Random Harvest* scant justice. Although I have been able to give you no inkling of how well the story is told, you will believe me when I say that the reader finds himself wholly absorbed. I cannot imagine any one who has once taken it up putting the book down till the last page is reached. The suspense and interest are heightened by the manner of the telling. The narrative opens in 1937, and but for two short sections it carries the reader backward. It is some little while before we learn what Rainier's life has been since he recovered his memory, and only last of all are we told about the missing portion of his past, beginning with the moment of his escape from the asylum. All that intensifies the power exerted by the novel while it is being read. But it is more than narrative skill that ministers to our enjoyment. There are numerous deft touches which not only make the narrative vivid, but also endow it with an apparent sweep and depth. Unobtrusively the reader is given the impression that the private drama of Charles Rainier is being played against a background of the national drama which culminated in the outbreak of the present war. The tale traverses a wide range of English life, and each social *milieu* is drawn with just those features that are commonly supposed to endear England to us. There are vignettes of the green and pleasant English countryside. There are attractive characters. A clergyman named Blampied might have stepped out of the pages of Dickens, or at least out of those of J. B. Priestley, were he not so clearly Mr. Hilton's own. This clergyman inhabits a roomy house in Paddington, and Smithy and Paula, after their marriage, go to make their home with him. It is, you see, a rich pageant, and all bathed in the atmosphere of England during the

period when this present war was looming steadily nearer —the atmosphere of an approaching world-wide cataclysm. Altogether we may strongly be tempted to feel as we read that here is literature.

But are the symptoms I have spoken of—the symptoms of literature—actually present? In order to answer that question properly, I should have to take you through the novel in some detail. As I cannot do so, I must strongly urge you to read or to re-read it. Only then may you have a chance of seeing what I want to get at in the following comments.

First of all, the atmosphere of approaching war, which does so much to give the story its tension, is entirely unrelated to Rainier's private drama. Of course he is described as having lost his memory in one war, and we may, if we like, take it as implied that others will lose theirs in this war. But that does not make the case of Charles Rainier something broadly human. In fact, the atmosphere of approaching war has nothing to do with the plot. It is superadded in order to produce tension. It serves to make the novel timely. To some extent it turns the novel into journalism. Secondly, the deft sketches of English social life and the fond glimpses of the English countryside simply reflect the average reader's accepted notions of England. They supply a ready-made vividness. They are in reality commonplace. Thus what may be termed the trappings of the story are negligible. But that would not matter if the story itself dealt, however faintly, with some universal piece of life. And there we come to an essential defect.

In deciding whether any particular novel is or is not literature, we need to bear in mind that every novel is the homogeneous combination of various elements. There is first of all, of course, the anecdote or story. Then there is the disposition and working out of that story. There is the conception and exhibition of character. Regarding characters in a novel, none will impress himself on a reader unless he not only has intrinsic appeal, but also is exhibited

in action. Next, the various parts of the narrative have to be given such proportions and to be so ordered as to arouse and sustain interest. And finally there is the actual writing. Although in analysis these various elements are distinguishable and can be examined one by one, they are always found in any actual novel to form an indivisible unity. The consequence is that the weakness of any one of them is fatal to the whole. A novel may be well written; its characters attractive and duly exhibited in action; and the parts of the narrative admirably ordered and proportioned to the best effect. Yet if, in spite of all that, the story is a trivial one, the novel cannot be literature. It is essential that somehow or other the anecdote or story should be endowed with significance.

Now, notwithstanding the charm of narration and characterization, the story in *Random Harvest* is meaningless. It is pointless. It may be contended that the situation of Rainier, once he has recovered his memory but cannot recollect what he has done in the interval during which he had lost it, is a poignant one. And still more poignant of course is the situation of Paula, once her Smithy has vanished from her ken, although of this situation of Paula's nothing is made. The point is, however, that if we came upon such a situation as Rainier's in real life, although we might find it curious, and even odd, yet we should not be deeply or truly moved. Our apprehension —our emotional apprehension—of the nature of life would remain unaffected. To repeat my quotation from Chesterton last week, death is always more tragic than death by starvation. By the same token, memory is always more wonderful than losing one's memory. We are not carried deep into the heart of life by having our attention fixed on something freakish or odd. And that is all *Random Harvest* does; it selects and dwells upon a piece of freakishness. As a result, the novel has no real connexion with life, ordinary life, life as it is, the life that alone matters. And this absence of any ties with life is made worse by the fact that the novel pretends to have them.

Finally, it may be noticed that the conclusion to which the whole novel tends, that the secretary whom Rainier marries as Rainier is also the Paula he has previously married in the identity of Smithy, is something no doubt sentimentally picturesque, yet something that remains terribly far-fetched. We are left asking ourselves how it is that the secretary during all the years she lives with Rainier as his wife never reminds him in any way of their buried past. Not only, then, is this detail far-fetched; it is also fantastically alien both to actual human experience and to our intuitions of the real. It rings false. Admittedly in real life husbands and wives may live together without truly coming to know one another, but that is in quite another sense. In fact, in this element of *Random Harvest* we have part of what is an almost scandalous disguise or falsification of the texture of actual life, a disguise or falsification far more common in present-day fiction than is generally realized.

It is the presence of this spuriousness which I am anxious to bring home to you, for it is a matter of judgement and taste—that judgement and taste which are so vital to reading for profit—to be able to detect it in novels. The fact that *Random Harvest* deals with loss of memory and pictures its heroine living unrecognized by her husband is enough to determine that *Random Harvest* can have as much to do with literature as has the bearded lady at the fair or as have the coadunate or Siamese twins. Notwithstanding the engaging narrative manner and the charm, notwithstanding that the novel holds the reader absorbed so long as he is actually reading, the reading of *Random Harvest* can yield no profit. There is only freakishness or oddity there for us to bear away from having read it. The symptoms of literature are absent.

Let us pass to our second contemporary novel. Let us consider a novel which produced some stir when it was first published in 1925 and which has continued in demand —*A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster. Again I cannot avoid giving away the plot.

An English girl, Miss Quested, has come out to India in order to marry an English official there named Ronny Heaslop. She is chaperoned by Heaslop's mother, who because she has remarried is called Mrs. Moore. Miss Quested and Mrs. Moore get to know an Indian doctor, a Mohammedan called Aziz. He invites them to make an excursion to some famous caves. When the party arrives at the caves, Miss Quested and Aziz are separated from their companions. She goes into one cave, and while alone in the dark there she fancies—what? We are never told, but it amounts to this, that she fancies Aziz is trying to kiss her. Very much upset, she makes her way back with other friends. When Aziz returns to the town, he is at once arrested. The English as one man jump to the conclusion that he is guilty. Only one person refuses to condemn him till at least he has been tried. This is Fielding, the English middle-aged principal of the local college. Aziz has been his friend. Mrs. Moore sides with Fielding, but gives him no support. Instead she sets out for England, and dies at sea. Fielding is left alone. He becomes extremely unpopular. At last the trial takes place. Miss Quested, on being called upon for her evidence, suddenly realizes, it would seem, the gravity of her charges. She declares she has been mistaken. Aziz did not try to kiss her. He is acquitted. But he is without gratitude to Miss Quested. He thinks only of the injustice he has suffered. She is now cold-shouldered by the English, who are disgusted with her for having said, first one thing, then another. She has broken off her engagement. It is now she instead of Aziz who is the Ishmaelite. Once again Fielding comes forward. He finds a lodging for her till she can leave for home. This kindness of Fielding's leads to a breach between him and Aziz. The latter is unable to impute it to simple humanity. He imagines that Fielding must have fallen in love with Miss Quested, and he is uncontrollably jealous. Fielding too goes back to England. Two years later, having in the interval married Heaslop's half-sister, Stella Moore, he is again in India.

With his wife and her brother he visits a native state. There he meets Aziz. They make up their quarrel, but fail to become friends again. The day for harmony and complete understanding between English and Indians is not yet.

That, briefly, is the story in *A Passage to India*. The principal characters are Fielding and Aziz. Indeed, they are the only people in the book that deserve to be called characters. There is a certain appropriateness in their standing alone, as in a way everything in the story happens for their sake. The reader is brought to feel a genuine sympathy with the temperament and feelings of Aziz, and yet the little doctor remains shadowy and something of an enigma. It seems as if his author had not fully understood him. His true self is never brought out into the open. It is, above all, for the sake of Fielding that everything in the story happens. Fielding, if any one, is its hero. He is a middle-aged man, accustomed to keep to, and to rely on, himself, and he has worked out a private philosophy of the good life. The contours of this philosophy are vague, and it is nebulous at the centre. That is the lot of private philosophies. No philosophy of life is ever clear-cut and sound at the core unless it has been built up out of the combined wisdom of a society. Fielding's philosophy is, however, definite enough to incite him to deliberate efforts at understanding both those Indians whom he gets to know and Indian institutions. He is the only white man in the book to do this. At the same time he is not shown to make similar efforts to understand the English with whom he comes in touch in India. But—and this is notable—he is shown to be aware on occasion that he fails to live up to his own philosophy, and also to ask himself at times if the philosophy reaches out far enough. In short, *A Passage to India* is about the reactions to certain events in India of a middle-aged Englishman with an individual attitude to life which he finds to be only partly adequate. And the events, you will have noticed, are fundamental events, i.e. events involving the whole moral problem of our behaviour to one another. It is

obvious that here we are far removed from the triviality of *Random Harvest*. Here, unmistakably, we are in the presence of what, for lack of a more definite name, we call significance.

The question we have thereupon to ask ourselves is this. How does reading about Fielding in this situation affect us? It is solely through an answer to this question that we can settle whether or not *A Passage to India* is literature. We do not read a novel in order to obtain information. We do not read a novel for enlightenment regarding the manners of some social group. We do not read a novel in order to be shown right and wrong. It is true that the reading of a novel may frequently yield us information, that our experience of manners may be thereby widened and intensified, and our sense of fine shades in morality made more acute. But all that is secondary. We read a novel primarily in order to be moved—to be moved either by the exhibition of a facet of life or else by the nature of life which it may allegorize. Our having this emotion for the sake of which we read a novel depends on a combination in the novel of artistic harmony with seriousness of theme and seriousness of treatment. The only thing that matters about a novel, as about any other book we read, is its effect upon us. And the effect of reading a novel—a piece of imaginative narration—is primarily emotional. The quality of our emotion is the measure of the quality of the novel. There, then, is the question with which a reading of *A Passage to India* must confront us: How are we moved by the spectacle of Fielding in his particular situation? Two considerations bear on the nature of our answer.

The centre of the story is of course Miss Quested's complaint against Aziz, and the most spectacular and tense event the surge of feeling which sweeps the English of the town in the face of this complaint—a surge of feeling which, excited as it is by mere suspicion that an Indian has laid hands on a white woman, is blind and irrational. No doubt in a country like India, a country numbering only a handful of whites among hundreds of millions of natives, the

suspicion alone is enough to warrant alarm. But that does not justify the forsaking of all reasonableness. We know that wherever Europeans are in contact with human beings of another colour, the same rabid feelings are liable to run riot on very slight provocation. Elemental passions are loosed. Seemingly civilized persons are instantly transformed into beings almost animal. In India—at any rate nowadays—the forms of decency are preserved. The accused is given a trial. The judge is one of his own race. But that is not enough. In *A Passage to India* we are shown the English almost to a man believing that the accused native is guilty while he has still not yet been tried. And elsewhere; in the Southern States of the American Union, for example, the forms of decency are easily cast aside, and Judge Lynch very easily takes charge.

Now some readers this picture of English race hatred in India may offend. Regular soldiers who have done a tour of duty in India may be inclined to protest that the picture is unfair. It is true that regular soldiers who have been in India seldom know anything about ordinary life there. We are all aware that the passions depicted in the novel as breaking out in India lurk in whites elsewhere on the globe. They are never far below the surface. It does not always need the red rag of colour to call them forth. Think of the Black and Tans in Ireland. Nevertheless, the objection that the picture is unfair should not be dismissed lightly. A novelist is entitled to all the licence he may need in order to be able to bring about the events on which his story turns. Every novelist, it must be borne in mind, is the servant of artistic laws. It is according to these laws that events in his fictions turn out as they do. Furthermore, as I pointed out last week, we should not address ourselves to any piece of writing expecting it to agree with our own prepossessions. But if, allowing for all that, a novelist yet offends the sense of verisimilitude of a body of readers, he inevitably mars the effect which his novel can have upon them. And that is an artistic mistake.

That is one consideration. The other concerns the characterization. I have already said that Fielding and Aziz are the only persons in *A Passage to India* that deserve the name of characters. The women—Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested, the Collector's wife—remain dummies. The author pretends to some knowledge of Mrs. Moore, but the portrait remains unconvincing. It is theoretical and frigid. Miss Quested he cannot be said to have bothered about. But more important is his failure with the English officials—Heaslop, the Collector, the magistrate, the police-officer. They are exhibited to us entirely from the outside. They are drawn without sympathy. And in view of the part they play, that the novelist should feel sympathy for them was imperative.

In the face of these two considerations, perhaps we should not say more of *A Passage to India* than that it is on the way to being literature.

I come to the third and last novel—the novel whose author died in 1870. As you may have guessed, the author who died in 1870 is Charles Dickens. As for the novel, it is *Bleak House*. Unlike the two novels we have already looked at, *Bleak House* is not the working out of a single theme. It lacks a single focus of interest. Fashion at the time it was written forbade such concentration. But although it is a novel compounded of no fewer than three independent plots, and although two of these plots were devised, not for their own sake, not for their intrinsic narrative effect, but in order to arouse indignation, the one against a crying social abuse, and the other against a far different social injustice, wastage, and indifference, the three several strands of narrative are remarkably interwoven and they unite in producing very nearly a single impression.

The crying social abuse has long since been remedied. *Bleak House* is in the first place an attack on the scandalous delays customary in the Court of Chancery at the time it was written. At the very beginning the reader is told of " the ten thousand stages of an endless cause," of " bills, cross-

bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense." We hear of "various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it." This is not the only cause, and among the many minor characters is Miss Flite, who, led on by hopes always disappointed but never relinquished, has come to live solely to attend the court in a cause of her own. There is, however, *the* cause. It is Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce. In the foreground of the novel is young Richard Carstone, who owing to former delays in this cause is a ward in Chancery, and the fresh delays, long drawn out and ever renewed, turn him into a monomaniac. The prospect of the wealth which Chancery may suddenly award to him becomes an obsession. He has no peace. He can settle neither to medicine nor to any other study. Little by little, the cause comes to fill his days and nights. He falls into the hands of a predatory lawyer, he estranges himself from his kind guardian, he imagines that if only he can master details he will hasten judgement. The repeated baffling and thwarting which he encounters as a result of his imaginings affect his health. He falls ill and dies.

In the second place, *Bleak House* takes up arms against the neglect of poor and orphan children, a neglect which it contrasts with the lavishing of money on missions to the heathen. I dare not say that this social injustice has been remedied as thoroughly as have been the former abuses of Chancery, although in this respect, too, things have changed. However, there is no doubt that the injustice was at its worst when Dickens wrote. The treatment of this second theme leads Dickens to beget three characters, all of them vivid and unforgettable. They are Poor Jo, a London crossing-sweeper; Mrs. Jellyby, who leaves her children and her husband to fend for themselves while she gives all her time to raising money for the settlement of families on the left bank of the River Niger, where they are to grow coffee and educate the natives of Borrioboola-Gha; and the Rev. Mr. Chadband, whose name has passed into

the language as synonymous with a sanctimonious and close-fisted hypocrite.

The third theme, entirely unconnected with the other two, is the mystery surrounding the birth of a girl named Esther Summerson, who narrates the greater part of the story. Long before the end this mystery has been solved for the reader. Esther is the daughter of the wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock, a country gentleman. Her father is a Captain Hawdon, who, when first mentioned, is earning a bare living as a humble scrivener under the name of Nemo. The family lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, possesses himself of Lady Dedlock's secret; and she, presumably fearing either exposure or blackmail, murders him. The police trace the crime to her. Distraught with fear and shame, she runs away, doubles back on her tracks, and at last collapses on the point of death beside Hawdon's grave, which is in Chancery Lane, only a few yards from the pernicious Court of Chancery.

This of course is melodrama, sentimental melodrama. Yet it is melodrama touched to higher issues. That final headlong flight of Lady Dedlock's has since become a customary feature of the popular thriller. As John Buchan has remarked in describing—in *Memory Hold the Door*—how he came to write *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, flight and pursuit, when made subjects of narrative, instantly produce excitement and tension. But in *Bleak House* they do more. When we ask ourselves what is the effect which the reading of *Bleak House* has upon us, this is not its least moving feature. Lady Dedlock has committed murder in a state of desperation. It is a frantic last-minute attempt to conceal a shameful secret. Nevertheless, not only does the secret out; the murder also is brought home to her. So she flees, and the reader, if attuned to the novel, will feel in reading of her flight that it is not merely a panic-stricken search for hiding, but also a wild quest for expiation.

Nowadays people speak glibly of not understanding how a sense of sin is conceivable. Bertrand Russell and Dr. Broad, the professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge,

are among them, and there are others who should likewise know better. For, far from there being any difficulty in conceiving a sense of sin, it is inconceivable that anybody could ever dwell in thought on the life going on around him, and especially on his own past, and not be oppressed by a sense of moral failure, a sense of opportunities missed, of miserable pusillanimity, of a wretched omission on the part of every human being to rise to occasions and to display the best that is in him. There is, as a poet has lately put it,

> The rending pain of re-enactment
> Of all that you have done, and been ; the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

And that is nothing other than the sense of sin or the sense of guilt. It is a universal human emotion. And equally universal is the craving to expiate, to wipe out one's guilt, one's failure, all guilt being a form of failure and all failure guilt. So the search for expiation, whenever it occurs, has about it a primitive and simple grandeur.

Bleak House, then, aims on the one hand at stirring in its readers a natural human indignation against two great social evils. On the other hand, it appeals to our share of the general awareness of every man's pitiful failure to live up to his own vision, to live up to the capacity he is himself aware of, an awareness often wild with all regret. That is a good deal to find within the pages of a single novel. Even so, it does not exhaust the emotional appeal of *Bleak House*. Hovering over all three themes is the oppressively disturbing presence of fate. Dickens doubtless was not primarily a thinker. He wrote out of the fullness of his heart, and with his eyes ever alert to aid him. Subtleties of analysis, the rendering of the interplay of delicate human relationships, the handling of deep and difficult subjects like religion—all these were beyond him. He painted with a full thick brush and in lurid colours.

Furthermore, it has to be noticed that *Bleak House* in no way makes out a case against the Court of Chancery. It

in no way shows society to be at fault in the neglect of Poor Jo or of other orphans who figure in the story. I grant this is a pity. Even though nothing can be demonstrated by means of fiction, the attacks carried out in *Bleak House* on the delays of Chancery and on the neglect of poor children might have been made logically more effective. Then, too, Lady Dedlock might have been made to go in quest of expiation without melodrama and without sentimentalism. In fact, I am ready to grant that *Bleak House* might have been a finer novel than it is; and that necessarily weakens its claim to be literature.

I am, however, more anxious to emphasize that ultimately its weaknesses are of small account. What really matters is that, in spite of the absence of all logic from its twofold indictment of society, and in spite of its sentimental melodrama, *Bleak House* moves us as much as it delights us. It moves us with its exhibition of Lady Dedlock's quest of expiation; it moves us with its presence of fate; it moves us with its show of the evils of Chancery and of the pathetic neglect of Poor Jo. Above all, it moves us by means of something I have not yet mentioned. It moves us by means of its broad humanity. The pages of *Bleak House* are crowded with lively and fascinating characters, and many of them are portrayed with exuberant humour. I have not yet named, and now I can do no more than name, such unforgettable figures as Caddy Jellyby, the Turveydrops, Guppy, Mrs. Bagnet, and Harold Skimpole. And this expansive humanity which pervades *Bleak House*, as it pervades the other novels and stories of Dickens, makes of it a novel dealing with the substance of life, with the serious in life, and with the seriousness of life. Here, therefore, plain and unmistakable, are the symptoms of literature.

A novel can prove nothing, a novel cannot show that anything needs to be reformed: a novel moves. It moves its readers, and that is all it does. That is all, and it is everything. The reader of a novel is moved by the exhibition to him as he reads of an aspect of life, an exhibition

made in narrative form in contrast to an exhibition in direct experience. In direct experience we are too close to life to behold it. It does not readily turn itself for us into spectacle. In a novel a spectacle is precisely what life becomes. And it is a test of the novelist's art, it is essential to our enjoyment and emotion, that nothing shall come between this spectacle and us. Only too many novelists have preached. Only too many novelists have written to a thesis. This is always a mistake, because the preaching, the flogging of the thesis, raises a kind of curtain between the spectacle and the reader. The evidence that a novel is literature lies, let me say once again, in the quality of what we feel. In *Random Harvest*—the first of the three novels we have considered—the aim, as we saw, is to affect readers with the spectacle of some imagined consequences of a loss of memory. The trouble there is that loss of memory is an oddity of life, not a part of universal life. *A Passage to India* presents us with the spectacle of human beings failing to understand one another. It is not a plea for Indian self-government. It is not a plea for more enlightened English officials in India. It is not a plea for anything, and India has nothing fundamental to do with it. India, life in India, is only a peg to hang the story on. Why the novel is about India is that the presence of two mutually alien races, Europeans and Asiatics, makes the spectacle of the lack of understanding plainer, larger, coarser, more dramatic than it would be if set forth amid, say, a circle of mutual acquaintances in England. But it is that lack of understanding—as embodied in the character Fielding—that is the justification of the novel, that is what is in the novel for us to enjoy and to be moved by. *A Passage to India* is therefore significant; it is significant because lack of understanding is one of the most moving features of life—real life. It is true that significance in a novel is not enough to move readers to enduring emotion. In addition, it is essential that the characterization and the form of the story should leave the reader aesthetically satisfied. That is where *A Passage to India* falls short.

So it has to be left with a question mark. It is a novel on the way to being literature ; we dare not say more. *Bleak House* also has weaknesses. As I have suggested, few of its readers are stirred by the particular fate of Richard Carstone. But there is much else for the moving of everybody ; the presence of fate, the misery of Poor Jo (or, rather, that Poor Jo is miserable), the quest of expiation, and the pervading presence of a broad humanity. *Bleak House* thus triumphs over its weaknesses. These are the symptoms that it is literature.

I do not delude myself that to have briefly examined, as we have now done, one novel that is certainly not literature and one that is certainly great literature is enough to ensure that we shall hereafter invariably recognize, in novels we happen to read, either the symptoms of literature or their absence. In themselves the symptoms vary from novel to novel. What makes a novel by Dickens is not what makes one by Jane Austen to be literature. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is literature in quite another way than *Guy Mannering*. Moreover, all we have been able to say about *A Passage to India* is that it is on the way to being literature, or, in other words, that it may be literature. Among novels the borderline case is fairly common. But at least we may now be able to feel that we have had an instance of the symptoms of literature in novels put before us and that we now have some notion of what we are to ask ourselves whenever we wish to decide if the symptoms are present. First of all, the story itself must prove absorbing while we read. That requirement is possibly met more by *Random Harvest* than by *A Passage to India*. Yet *A Passage to India* is the better novel. Secondly, the characters should have humanity. That requirement is best met by *Bleak House*. Above all, the story needs to be significant ; it should deal with some vital element in the universal life of mankind. That is why *A Passage to India* is superior to *Random Harvest*, and *Bleak House* superior to both.

In conclusion, let us bear in mind something very important. It is this. We shall be helped to diagnose

the presence of the symptoms of literature in novels by reading some books about the novel as a literary form. Two such books that I particularly recommend are *The Craft of Fiction* by Percy Lubbock and *Aspects of the Novel* by E. M. Forster.

APPENDIX TO SECOND LECTURE

A List of Novels by Authors No Longer Living

William De Morgan, *Joseph Vance* (1906).
John Galsworthy, *A Man of Property* (1906).
Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (1903).
Henry James, *The Wings of a Dove* (1902).
Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (1901).
Henry James, *A Turn of the Screw* (1898).
Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1896).
George Moore, *Esther Waters* (1894).
R. L. Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker* (1892).
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).
George Meredith, *One of Our Conquerors* (1891).
Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891).
R. L. Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrong Box* (1889).
J. H. Shorthouse, *John Inglesant* (1880).
George Meredith, *The Egoist* (1879).
Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1878).
Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (1872).
George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72).
R. D. Blackmore, *Lorna Doone* (1869).
Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868).
Anthony Trollope, *The Claverings* (1867).
Wilkie Collins, *Armadale* (1866).
Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65).
Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860–61).
Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1860).
Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860).
George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859).

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859).
Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1858).
Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne* (1858).
Anthony Trollope, *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite.*
Charles Reade, *It's Never Too Late to Mend* (1856).
Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho !* (1855).
Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (1853).
Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852–53).
Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia* (1853).
W. M. Thackeray, *Esmond* (1852).
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849–50)
Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (1849).
W. M. Thackeray, *Pendennis* (1848–49).
Mrs. Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848).
W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847–48).
Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred* (1847).
Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847).
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847).
Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* (1845).
Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby* (1844).
Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44)
Charles Lever, *Charles O'Malley* (1841).
Harrison Ainsworth, *Old St. Paul's* (1841).
Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836).
F. Marryat, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836).
Bulwer-Lytton, *Eugene Aram* (1832).
Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle* (1831).
Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819).
Walter Scott, *Rob Roy* (1818).
Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818).
Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818).
Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818).
Maria Edgeworth, *Ormond* (1817).
Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816).
Walter Scott, *Old Mortality* (1816).
Walter Scott, *The Antiquary* (1816).
Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (1815).
Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814).

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814).
M. G. Lewis, *The Monk* (1813).
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).
Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).
Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).
W. Beckford, *Vathek* (1786).
Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (1778).
Tobias Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771).
Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1765).
Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1760 *et seq.*).
Tobias Smollett, *Peregrine Pickle* (1751).
Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749).
Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random* (1748).
Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (1747–48).
Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (1742).
Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722).
Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).
Mrs. Aphra Behn, *The Fair Jilt* (1698).
William Congreve, *Incognita* (1692).
Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).
Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde* (1590).
Robert Greene, *Menaphon* (1589).
John Lyly, *Euphues* (1578, 1580).
Sir Philip Sidney, *Arcadia* (1502).
Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* (1484).

Books About the Novel

Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction.*
E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel.*

THIRD LECTURE

FICTION *v.* TRUTH

IT is quite possible to read only novels and to read for profit. But the profit we obtain from reading novels is likely to be greater if we read other kinds of literature as well. And also, the reading of books of each of these other kinds can of course yield to us a profit of its own. For this reason, although it may seem that what I said last week regarding the symptoms of literature in novels requires to be amplified, I can afford to say no more on that subject. I must now pass to other kinds of writing.

We shall, I say, find our reading of good novels the more profitable if we do not avoid reading anything else. I am not going to enter into the rival merits of realism and romance. Here they are irrelevant. Whether a novel appears to mirror the lives of human beings faithfully or whether it tends to fantasy, or even engenders for the unfolding of its action a world of its own, it is always in some way or other about life. Life is what novels cannot possibly escape from. Life is the sole material of narrative. And so it follows that in order to decide if the story in a novel is significant we have to refer it to life ; that is to say, to our convictions and feelings about real life.

Now I grant that these convictions and feelings depend for their comprehensiveness and especially for their depth on the actual body of experience possessed by each reader as well as of course on the extent of his power of intuition and insight, his instinctive understanding. But reading is as much a part of experience as making a fortune or being betrayed by one's best friend ; and although—as I have previously said—the effects which reading has upon us are unique, unlike anything else, the reading—again as I have previously said—does influence and modify, often very considerably, our attitude to the situations and

events, the trials and encounters, of our daily existence. In other words, our reading is absorbed into our body of experience and becomes a part of it. In some impalpable and indefinable way, what I may call our sense of direction of life is made more assured. Of course, to read about somebody falling in love is very different from falling in love oneself. That goes without saying. And yet who will deny that our notions, and even our manner, of falling in love, are coloured—how deeply we cannot tell—by all we have read concerning the vexatious and delightful business? Hence there is every reason why we should not only hold up some incident we come across in a novel to our own personal experience, but also to our recollections of our previous reading and its effects upon us. Yes, there is every reason.

Yet did we read nothing but novels, holding up some passage in a novel to the test of comparison with our previous reading would never be altogether satisfactory. For although, as I say, novels are invariably and unavoidably concerned with life, not even the most starkly realistic novel ever portrays life as it is. To claim that it does is rather like what Whistler described as telling the pianist that he is sitting on the piano. Inevitably there is distortion. Last week I alluded to the æsthetic laws to which a novel has to conform. I mean, that once a novel has begun in a certain way, it has to end correspondingly, or the reader's sense of fitness—a sense he is usually unaware of possessing, but one that always asserts itself—will be outraged. To see that there is always distortion of life in a novel, we need only compare an autobiographical novel with the corresponding biography, when there happens to be one; say, *David Copperfield* with John Forster's *Life of Dickens*. We shall then see that if a novelist wishes to record fact, he writes an autobiography, and that when, instead, he has written a novel, it is because he has wished to liberate himself from fact. It will also be instructive for each of us to examine, when we have the opportunity, a book entitled *The Private Papers of Henry Maitland* by

the late Morley Roberts. For this is a biography disguised as a novel; it is most readable, but it does not succeed in being a novel at all. You will see what I mean if you read it. And so it must help us to decide if the novels we read are significant to refer what we have found in them to our recollections of writings in which life is not distorted, and in order to have these recollections we must read such writings. It is especially desirable that we should read biographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, and autobiographies. For, ostensibly at least, most of these reflect life direct instead of distortedly, as it is reflected through the prism of fiction.

As I said just now, writings of all these kinds can provide profitable reading in themselves. Indeed, while we need to read them in order the better to read novels for profit, primarily they are to be read for their own sake—for the profit that may be derived from reading them. In order to obtain this profit, however, we need, as with novels, to be able to distinguish what is not literature from the genuine article. So this evening, as you see, we continue in quest of the symptoms of literature.

It is especially necessary to be able to recognize the presence or absence of the symptoms in a biography. During the last quarter of a century new biographies have been very numerous. More biographies have been published in that period than in any previous twenty-five years. The reading of biographies seems to have become very nearly a craze. There has even been talk of the discovery or invention of a new art of biography. How has this come about? A brief examination of the facts will repay itself.

It was in the middle of the war of 1914–18 that there appeared a book called *Eminent Victorians*. This book consists of brief sketches of the careers of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and General Gordon. The author was named Lytton Strachey. Probably most of you have read the book at some time or other, for on its appearance it attracted much attention. More than that, it came to have a wide influence. It was

the forerunner of all the popular biographies that have appeared since.

Strachey himself did not fail to claim that he was making a new departure—new, at least, in English. In a short preface, he declared that

> the art of biography seems to have fallen on evil times in England. . . . The most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeyman of letters. . . . Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead, . . . are as familiar as the *cortège* of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism.

He claimed instead

> to preserve . . . a becoming brevity, . . . to maintain his own freedom of spirit, . . . to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions.

The claim had an agreeable speciousness. On turning from the preface to the narratives that followed, the reader found the expectations which had been raised in him not entirely disappointed. Indisputably, the narratives were brief. That they were also dispassionate and impartial was not so evident. Strachey, in maintaining, as he doubtless imagined, his own freedom of spirit, adopted an ironical and sceptical tone, the tone of the pseudo-man-of-the-world, i.e. of the man who mistakes the high table and the college quadrangle for the world, of the man who has

> Not met with fortune other than at feasts,
> Full of warm blood, of mirth, of gossiping.

Nevertheless, the unsuspecting reader was given the illusion of having the facts laid bare before him, and as each narrative possessed an alluring momentum and simplicity, he found himself charmed. I have said that Strachey claimed to be making a new departure only in English. He imagined himself indeed to reincarnate the spirit of the French eighteenth century, and considered that he was merely showing us that they ordered this matter better in France. That is no doubt why he spoke in his preface of a *cortège* instead of a procession. Actually Macaulay

had already been equally succinct in English, and Gibbon rather more urbanely ironical and sceptical. But of this most readers seemed unaware. So *Eminent Victorians* went its successful way, and the report got about that the art of biography had been regenerated.

But when Strachey went on to write *Queen Victoria*, and more particularly *Elizabeth and Essex*, studies in which he forsook the brevity that had masked some of his weaknesses, and in which also his manner turned progressively into mannerism, his hold on the public gradually weakened. Admiration cooled. His characteristics as a biographer fell into perspective, and they were scrutinized more closely. It was then perceived that instead of elevating his art he had merely degraded it. His brilliance was seen to be meretricious. Civilization cannot rest on a pure negative, and his air of exposing facts and of being dispassionate could pass for the expression of the highest civilized realism only with those who did not stop to notice that a pure negative was all he had to offer. The four figures he dealt with in *Eminent Victorians* were all persons notable for their piety and sincere in their religious feeling. For him the choice could hardly have been more unfortunate. Of three of them he contended that their piety merely cloaked a pursuit of worldly ambition; of the fourth that it was no more than an amiable eccentricity conjoined with dipsomania. Thereby he shed no light on the complexities of religious aspiration, and he did agnosticism no service. He but succeeded in laying bare his own insensibility to the deeper and more serious emotions. His sketches came to be seen as in reality superficial, and his irony as the waspish malice of one confronted with facts that defied his comprehension.

All this, as I say, was not realized till *Eminent Victorians* had fallen into perspective, and Strachey, emboldened by success, had gone on to flaunt his weaknesses. For some years his claims were accepted at his own value. At the same time as he enjoyed the public favour a swarm of minor writers succumbed to his influence. Whenever a book by means of some apparent novelty catches the

public fancy, there is heard a kind of clamour for the seeming novelty to be repeated, and of course there is no lack of ready imitators. That is how it is that biography became almost a craze. But while Strachey did not lack imitators, he bred no disciples. In the numerous biographies which were now pressed upon the public there was none of his mock simplicity and veneered scepticism. The master had never hesitated to concede the greatness of his sitters. His fancy had not gone beyond tinkering with chronology. The imitators, on the contrary, set out to show very reassuringly that a great man was fundamentally as commonplace as his brother, the man in the street. They made greatness understandable by leaving it out. At the same time they let their imaginations run away with them. They invented conversations and ascribed motives wholesale. Biography was turned into a baser kind of fiction.

It implies no apology for the standard life "in two fat volumes" to say that the so-called new biographers, from Strachey downwards, have come nowhere near achieving literature. I incline to think myself that the biographies it can be profitable to read are of exactly two kinds. On the one hand, there is the biography written out of long, close, and first-hand knowledge of the man whose life it records. On the other hand, there is the biography written by a stranger, but yet either welding into a whole all the information that has accumulated concerning the figure selected or else seeking to set forth the significance of this figure for his own time, possibly for all time. The first biography in English to be a work of art is *The Life and Death of Thomas Woolsey* by George Cavendish (published 1637), "the personal memoir of a man with a genius for narrative." However, Nicholas Harpsfield's *Life of Thomas More*, written probably only a few months later, has better claims to rank as a genuine biography. These are two examples of the first kind. A. F. Pollard's *Wolsey*, written in our own generation, and the little monograph by Mandell Creighton (1843–1901) bearing the same title, are examples

of the biography that seeks to set forth the significance of its subject for his time. The *Thomas More* of R. W. Chambers (1935) is an example of the biography that aims at putting its reader in possession of as much information as possible about its subject.

As it should help us to acquire the ability to distinguish what is not literature from the real thing in novels if we read good novels, so it should help us to acquire the same ability as regards biographies if we read good biographies. The two supreme biographies in English both belong to the first of the two classes I have just defined. They are Boswell's *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (1791), and, a good way behind, Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1836–38). The best edition of Boswell, by the way, is that of Birkbeck Hill.

Boswell says that in order "to exhibit my friend's conversation with any degree of its original flavour, it was necessary to write it down without delay." This in fact he did with unflagging regularity. And it is not only the conversation which he succeeds in reproducing with "its original flavour"; it is also the manner and the responsiveness of the man. The *Life of Dr. Johnson* is the fruit of great, assiduous, and prolonged labour. But the result is veracious detail: the Doctor moves and speaks before the reader with the vividness of a personal presence; and in the end we come to know him better than most of his friends can have known him, for we are presented with a comprehensive view of him. It is this minute and accurate detail which gives to the biography written out of first-hand acquaintance its peculiar value. Boswell's pages are so rich and varied that to pick on one passage rather than another is embarrassing. However, observe the effect on you of this:

> One night when Beauclerk and Langton had supped at a tavern in London, and sat till about three in the morning, it came into their heads to go and knock up Johnson, and see if they could prevail on him to join them in a ramble. They rapped violently at the door of his chambers in the Temple, till at last he appeared in his shirt, with his little black wig on the top of his head, instead of a nightcap, and a poker in his hand, imagining,

probably, that some ruffians were coming to attack him. When he discovered who they were, and was told their errand, he smiled, and with great good humour agreed to their proposal: "What, is it you, you dogs! I'll have a frisk with you." He was soon drest, and they sallied forth together into Covent-Garden, where the greengrocers and fruiterers were beginning to arrange their hampers, just come in from the country. Johnson made some attempts to help them; but the honest gardeners stared so at his figure and manner, and odd interference, that he soon saw his services were not relished. They then repaired to one of the neighbouring taverns, and made a bowl of that liquor called *Bishop*,[1] which Johnson had always liked; while in joyous contempt of sleep, from which he had been roused, he repeated the festive lines,

> Short, O short then be thy reign,
> And give us to the world again!

They did not stay long, but walked down to the Thames, took a boat, and rowed to Billingsgate. Beauclerk and Johnson were so well pleased with their amusement, that they resolved to persevere in dissipation for the rest of the day: but Langton deserted them, being engaged to breakfast with some young Ladies. Johnson scolded him for "leaving his social friends, to go and sit with a set of wretched *un-idea'd* girls." Garrick being told of this ramble, said to him smartly, "I heard of your frolick t'other night. You'll be in the *Chronicle*." Upon which Johnson afterwards observed, "*He* durst not do such a thing. His *wife* would not *let* him!"

This is not an incident in which Boswell himself took part. Yet he evidently heard all about it at first hand. And so we get the precision of detail: "with his little black wig on the top of his head instead of a nightcap", "the honest gardeners stared so at his figure and manner, and odd interference", "that liquor called *Bishop*, which Johnson had always liked"; and the accurate report of Johnson's actual words, "wretched *un-idea'd* girls", "His *wife* would not *let* him!" It is with countless touches of such detail that what I may call direct biography—the kind of biography of which the masterpieces by Boswell and Lockhart are supreme examples—is built up, and it is by giving us this detail that this kind of biography offers so

[1] *Bishop*. A cant word for a mixture of wine, oranges, and sugar.—Johnson's *Dictionary*.

much profit in the reading. The reading of it is a royal road to coming to understand men and to coming to understand the give and take of social relations.

So with Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*. The manner differs, but the detail is just as minute and vivid. Allow me to read you a passage from the account of Scott's relations with his young children.

> Mr. Morrit's mention of the "happy young family clustered round him" at Mr. Laidlaw's *kirn*, reminds me that I ought to say a few words on Scott's method of treating his children in their early days. He had now two boys and two girls;—and he never had more. He was not one of those who take much delight in a mere infant; but no father ever devoted more time and tender care to his offspring than he did to each of his, as they successively reached the age when they could listen to him, and understand his talk. Like their mute playmates, Camp and the greyhounds, they had at all times free access to his study: he never considered their tattle any disturbance; they went and came as pleased their fancy; he was always ready to answer their questions; and when they, unconscious how he was engaged, entreated him to lay down his pen and tell them a story, he would take them on his knee, repeat a ballad or a legend, kiss them, and set them down again to their marbles or their ninepins, and resume his labour as if refreshed by the interruption. From a very early age he made them dine at table, and "to sit up to supper" was the great reward when they had been "very good bairns." In short, he considered it as the highest duty as well as the sweetest pleasure of a parent to be the companion of his children; he partook all their little joys and sorrows, and made his kind unformal instructions to blend so easily and playfully with the current of their own sayings and doings, that so far from regarding him with any distant awe, it was never thought that any sport or diversion could go in the right way, unless *papa* were of the party, or that the rainiest day could be dull so he were at home.

This is not the same detail that Boswell gives us. Whereas Johnson exhibited himself in his speech, Scott had no conversation, and therefore Lockhart had to portray him in his habits and manners. Here, too, in the passage I have read, Lockhart is dealing with a period of Scott's life before he knew him. Yet in this single paragraph he sets something of the essential man before us.

Thus both Boswell and Lockhart have written great biographies because they have each succeeded in reproducing the detail of incidents and habits in the life of a man whom each knew intimately, and in the case of Boswell the detail of conversation as well. And, as I say, it is from this detail that we may get our profit. Lockhart remarks in his preface: "The interest of Sir Walter's history lies, I think, even peculiarly, in its minute details." We may object, I think, that this is not peculiar, and that the interest of every person's history that is worth recording lies "in its minute details." Of course the details have got to be selected and they must be arranged and described with art, even if the art be unconscious. But thereupon the significant detail is what is valuable. And so it is that Boswell and Lockhart provide us with a standard. Whenever we read any other biography written from first-hand acquaintance with its subject, we shall not find it equal either of these writers' masterpieces. But we can see how far it approaches to them, and thereby we are able to decide if it is literature. The effect which the detail has upon us —that we are interested and, especially, that we are moved —will tell us if we are obtaining profit, if the biography is worth dwelling on, if it is worth re-reading in order that we may extract from it as much understanding and feeling as we can. It is through the record of truly human detail that a biography written at first hand, a direct biography, carries its reader into the intimacy of the life it recounts, and it is in this way that it may enlarge very notably the reader's experience and understanding of human nature. It is only the direct biography that can do this. It is only the biographer who has known the man of whom he writes, and known him well, or else the biographer who obtains his material from early oral tradition, who can supply the veracious and significant detail. Boswell could never have produced a masterpiece had he not passed so much time in Johnson's company, nor Lockhart had he not been Scott's son-in-law.

There is the pseudo-direct biography. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) and the *Brief Lives* which John Aubrey wrote during the seventeenth century both seem to confine themselves to recording fact. But neither is invariably written out of first-hand acquaintance. And the result is distortion. Some of the things John Foxe says about Thomas More, for instance, are demonstrably erroneous. So, too, Aubrey's *Brief Lives* have recently been impugned on the score of inaccuracies. Nevertheless, whereas *The Book of Martyrs* dwells in much detail on death in torture and anguish, and on that account will not commend itself to every reader, the *Brief Lives* are wholly delightful. The style is strictly matter-of-fact, and nothing not concrete finds mention. Aubrey lets no theorizing mar the verisimilitude of his testimony. His fiction, when it is fiction he writes, has the stamp of truth.

We need also to avoid supposing that first-hand acquaintance with a man is enough in itself to ensure the writing of a good biography. Izaak Walton's delightful *Lives* (1640 *seq.*) exhibit an exception to this rule. He succeeds in telling us more about a man he had never met such as George Herbert than about Donne or Sir Henry Wotton whom he had known well. And sometimes the rule is directly contradicted. John Morley had known Gladstone long and closely. He had had as much opportunity of studying the real man in Gladstone as Boswell had had of studying the real man in Johnson. That does not mean that Morley's *Life of Gladstone* (1903) is a great piece of literature. It is a monumental achievement. It presents intelligently a mass of political detail. But it fails to make the reader see and be conscious of Gladstone the human being. It thus fails in what we must regard as the main object of that kind of biography.

Before I turn to the other, the second of the two kinds of biography that may yield profit to readers, I shall speak of memoirs, diaries, and letters, because in these too the reader is being allowed to enter into the intimacy of men and women as he never could have entered into it otherwise.

Diaries especially are apt to carry the conviction of significant truth just because they consist of notes each written at the time of the event or feeling recorded. As we all know, the most famous diaries in our language are those of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys, two friends who lived in the seventeenth century. It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that the diaries became public. Evelyn was friend to both Charles II and James II. He first was Commissioner of Works, and then, at the Restoration, became a Commissioner of the Privy Seal. Pepys was clerk to the Privy Seal under Charles II. In 1673 he became secretary to the Admiralty. The two men had exceptional opportunities for observing political and social happenings. So the general reader is perhaps more familiar with the life and events of this period than with those of any other. It is Evelyn who had his eye mainly on affairs and who records them with a marked personal touch. Pepys, who wrote in shorthand with no notion of publication, is unique for his artless and extremely frank self-revelation. There is probably no other bygone Englishman into whose thoughts and sensations we can enter so completely. The following extract admirably conveys the flavour of the *Diary* and typifies its intimate detail:

This evening I observed my wife mighty dull, and I myself was not mighty fond, because of some hard words she did give me at noon, out of a jealousy at my being abroad this morning, which, Gods knows, it was upon the business of the Office unexpectedly: but I to bed, not thinking but she would come after me. But waking by and by out of a slumber, which I usually fall into presently after my coming into the bed, I found she did not prepare to come to bed, but got fresh candles, and more wood for her fire, it being mighty cold, too. At this being troubled, I after a while prayed her to come to bed; so, after an hour or two, she silent, and I now and then praying her to come to bed, she fell out into a fury, that I was a rogue, and false to her. I did, as I might truly, deny it, and was mightily troubled, but all would not serve. At last, about one o'clock, she came to my side of the bed, and drew my curtaine open, and with the tongs red hot at the ends, made as if she did design to pinch me with them, at which, in dismay, I rose up, and with a few words she laid them down; and did by little and little, very

sillily, let all the discourse fall; and about two, but with much seeming difficulty, came to bed, and there lay well all night, and long in bed talking together, with much pleasure, it being, I know, nothing but her doubt of my going out yesterday, without telling her of my going, which did vex her, poor wretch! last night, and I cannot blame her jealousy, though it do vex me to the heart.

The *Diary* abounds in passages as good as this, and it is not surprising that since first being made known to the public in 1815, Pepys should have been a universal favourite. He never comments, he never tries to set himself in a more attractive light or to win sympathy by exaggerating his less happy experiences. He simply records. In short, he successfully does for himself what Lytton Strachey mistakenly thought he was doing for others.

We may not all care to read a diary as we read a novel. That does not matter. By all means let us use a diary as a bedside book. Let us dip and skip, go forward and then back. Here are a few more notable diaries by reading which we may help to form our judgement and taste. The *Journal* of George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (seventeenth century), has only lately been published as it was written. The *Journal* (eighteenth century) of John Wesley deals with the founding of the main branch of Methodism. Fanny Burney is the author of two remarkable diaries (eighteenth century also). The first is a record of her life with her parents in the country. Later she came to London and lived in the most brilliant social circle of her day. This is the period dealt with in the second diary. Crabb Robinson's *Diary* (1825) is of particular interest for its detail. The *Greville Memoirs* are a running commentary on English politics from the accession of George IV to the year 1860. Thomas Creevey left behind him unpublished at his death *Papers* in which he recorded the doings of most of the leading figures of his time. They were given to the public fairly recently. He seems to have known everybody and to have gone everywhere. As a result, the *Papers* will be found as instructive as they are entertaining. Coming down to our own day,

I may mention *The Voyage of the Discovery* by Captain R. F. Scott of the Antarctic. It is a book based on the log of the ship. How men met sudden and unforeseen situations during a journey of polar exploration is told with highly effective sobriety and with an eye to that significant detail on the importance of which for profitable reading I cannot insist too much.

It might seem that collections of letters likewise enable us to penetrate to the intimacy of the great or remarkable. Just at present such collections are second only to biographies in popular favour, and it might seem that their attraction lies in their giving a faithful reflection of the minds and activities of the writers. Of the minds, yes. But do they really show us the letter-writer in action? I remember once reading in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York —it was thanks to the courtesy of the librarian, Miss Greene —two original letters written in close succession by Carlyle. The first fulminated with wild invective against some supposed outrage by a publisher. The second recorded the writer's discovery that the supposed outrage was imaginary. If you like, those two letters show Carlyle in action in a sense. They show him to have been impulsive and quick-tempered, swift to suspect injury. They also show him to have been readily remorseful. But this is character rather than the exhibition of character in action. It is not equivalent to Johnson's saying "*Is it you, you* dogs ! I'll have a frisk with you," or to Scott laying down his pen in the midst of his writing and taking one of his little children on his knee in order to recount a ballad or a legend.

At best, letters show us but part of a man's activity. They do not, as a rule, display him in the spontaneous give and take of his daily mixing with his fellows. And since, as I have been at pains to point out, it is the record of that kind of action which quickens and enlarges our insight into human behaviour and into the springs of human behaviour, I think we must rate collections of letters a little inferior in potential profitableness to diaries and direct biographies.

There are exceptions. The *Paston Letters*, written in the course of the fifteenth century, exhibit in detail the lives of three generations of a comfortably off Norfolk family. The *Letters and Papers of the Verney Family* and the *Memorials of the Verney Family* (both only published in the nineteenth century) contain the history of a high-class gentleman's family from the reign of King John to the fall of King James. The reading of such collections helps us to see and to feel the ordinary individual living out his life in the midst of history, and at the same time it yields to us much significant human detail.

Horace Walpole passes for being the most varied and brilliant of English letter writers. His *Letters*—about 3,000 of them—were first collected in 1820, twenty-three years after his death. They shed light on nearly seventy important years of English history. And they do more. In some of them he discusses his own character or else his own writings, or again his family or his friends. In others he dwells on the French Revolution and other historical events. He has something to say of many of the literary figures contemporary with him. The *Letters* may be called a mirror of social history. In addition, what with their individual wit, playfulness, irony, and persiflage, they are perpetually entertaining. They are brilliant and incomparable. They can only be reproached with a slight lack of spontaneity. They are deliberate rather than natural.

Some collections of letters have another value. They combine with the reflection of a remarkable character the animated description of a far country and its customs—customs usually unfamiliar to the recipients. It is this combination which no doubt accounts largely for the enduring popularity of the witty and vivacious *Letters* of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1763). They are letters in which she pictures to her friends life in the Turkey of her day and to her daughter her subsequent experiences in Italy. Mention of Turkey brings to mind a book called *Eothen*. I will say something about it in a moment.

Meanwhile, let us notice that if on pure considerations of profit, we need, for the reasons I gave just now, to look on collections of letters with some reserve, we should look on autobiographies with a reserve rather greater. Of the collections of trivial anecdotes which at present so often pass for autobiographies I shall say nothing. I do not want to waste your time. In order that an autobiography may be reckoned literature, it has, I suggest, to be a work of one of two kinds. A man may simply narrate the main happenings—or what seem to him to have been the main happenings—of his life. It is also open to a man to put forward, in the guise of an account of his life, some sort of defence or apology for his life's conduct. A reader needs to look upon these two kinds of biography differently. Colley Cibber was a man who in the eighteenth century wrote plays and managed theatres. Cardinal Newman took a leading part during the nineteenth century in the Oxford or Tractarian Movement, a movement intended to bring the Church of England to a conviction of the need of ritual, to a position opposed to all liberalism, and then, after his conversion to Rome, he led an existence of relative obscurity, but one also of unobtrusive piety. Both men wrote autobiographies, and each entitled his an *Apology*. But whereas the *Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian* (1740), is at one and the same time an unaffected record of happenings and an unstudied gallery of portraits —portraits collected in the course of a life which needed no defence—the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864–65) of John Henry Newman is a piece of special pleading, a genuine apology or defence. The first book is an incomplete portrait of its times and also the material from which its readers may gain insight into human nature—that and no more. Newman wrote the second, as he tells us, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, and to some it may prove as poignant in the reading as it was in the writing. Nevertheless, there is no glossing the fact that it records happenings only as elements in an argument. It is not so much a portrait as the reflection of a personality. And I

use the word " personality " here in rather a special sense. I mean, the fixed pattern of the self which some men set up before their minds and to which they thereupon seek to make their lives and actions conform. Autobiographies of both kinds are often profitable reading, but the profit obtainable from each kind is bound to be different.

The deservedly well-known autobiography of Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (first published 1839), tells us a good deal about the man, but as much as anything it is an account of how the man turned into the historian. There are unforgettable passages—among them that dealing with his experiences in the militia, the dismissal in a few lines of the teaching faculty at Oxford in his day, the account of the changes in his religious opinions, and that of his sighing as a lover, but obeying as a son when his father refused consent to his marrying a young Swiss. The book, I ought to add, is easy and delightful to read. But little light is shed on how the individual mingled with his fellows. The *Autobiography* (1883) of Anthony Trollope the novelist is chiefly interesting for the information it supplies concerning the career of authorship. Fond of it as I am myself, I incline to consider more potentially profitable reading his mother's book, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). I do not do so on account of the latter book's description of the United States more than a hundred years ago as much as for the narrative of the odd predicament in which Mrs. Trollope found herself once she had arrived in America. In the way she was extricated from this predicament, humanity stands stark before us.

And mention of Mrs. Trollope leads me to say a word for a certain series of books of travel, books which, like hers, abound in enlightening detail of human behaviour. They are William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830), and George Borrow's *The Bible in Spain* (1843), *Lavengro* (1851), *The Romany Rye* (1857), and *Wild Wales* (1862). The finest travel book in English is, however, A. W. Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844). Delight begins for the reader with the opening description of the author's entry into Turkey—at Belgrade—

and lasts through the brilliant accounts of Lady Hester Stanhope in Syria and of the plague in Egypt. A book of wonderful touches.

Also rich in detail are two autobiographical works, the *Recollections* (of the Peninsular War) by Rifleman Harris (1809) and the *Autobiography and Journals* of Benjamin Robert Haydon, which were edited posthumously by Tom Taylor (1853). The contents of Rifleman Harris's book are sufficiently described by the title. Haydon was an early nineteenth-century painter who nourished with unfortunate obstinacy a curious obsession. He imagined that the world was anxious to have vast paintings of historical scenes and that he was the man to paint them. He was doubly mistaken. His pictures now lie in the cellars of Burlington House. But if he was an indifferent painter, he was a good observer and chronicler. He was the friend of William Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and other notable men of his time. His book, with its entertaining and detailed record of his social relations and of his painful struggles and disappointments, perpetuates his name.

We have seen that biographies of the kind I have so far spoken of—that is to say, direct biographies—and likewise diaries and journals, memoirs, collections of letters, and autobiographies which are not actual apologies—all these writings present us with a detailed record of individual behaviour, of the clash and harmonizing of personalities, of custom and usage, tradition and fashion. That is to say, they are writings presenting us with "truth." In that respect they differ from novels. You will say: But surely novels, too, present us with "truth"? Do not novels help us to an insight into human demeanour and contribute to the enlarging and mellowing of our attitude to life? Yes, they do. Yet we need to make certain distinctions. Sometimes, when a particular novel is being declared true to life or its characters well observed, no more may be meant than that the narration has an effect of sincerity and of fidelity to fact. No comparison with actual people and actual circumstances may be intended.

It is important to be on the look-out for this, because, for one thing, characters in a novel are seldom portraits of single individuals in real life, and because, for another thing, novels, as I have said, can demonstrate nothing whatsoever about the nature of life. At other times, however, when a novel is being declared true to life and its characters accurately drawn, the meaning is that the novel referred to does seem to be a faithful reflection of the behaviour and manners of a certain class or group of people in real life. It is because novels are often social histories in this sense that they can enlighten particular groups of readers regarding the way of the world. We can readily think of several sorts of men—a young foreigner, a young Englishman brought up abroad, a young working-man—for whom *The Forsyte Saga* of John Galsworthy, for example, would have been not long ago highly illuminating. Whatever notions of conduct and manners in the English upper middle-class might be held by men of these sorts, it is a social group they could normally have no opportunity of observing direct. A reading of *The Forsyte Saga* would have crystallized their notions. Quite as much as the vivid and accurate detail to be met with in biographical and autobiographical writings, faithful observation of this kind in a novel deserves the name of "truth." It deserves the name more than do the distortions that John Foxe and John Aubrey fall into on occasion in their biographies.

Even so, please notice that it is the element of pure fiction in novels which provides us readers with our main profit from reading them. We have already seen that the immediate attraction of a novel lies in the skill with which its plot is presented, handled—that is to say, it lies in the narrative. That is why, as I said last week, a novel such as *Random Harvest* is good reading—once. But unless the plot is worthy of the skill, no novel will possess any enduring attraction. What is a plot? It is, I think, Mr. E. M. Forster who to that question has returned the best answer.[1] The king died, and then the queen died

[1] Cf. his *Aspects of the Novel.* (Arnold, 1928.)

—that, he says, is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief—that is a plot. In other words, plot relates events. Thus it is always the plot which endows a novel with significance. *Bleak House* is a better novel than *Martin Chuzzlewit* because it has a better plot. In both novels the portrayal of character is equally rich. Some readers may appreciate and profit from faithful observation in the sense of portraiture; in short, the element of "truth." But this element is secondary. It is plot—or, if you like, significance—which alone can interest all readers. That is why the novels of John Galsworthy do not attain to being the highest literature. They disclose only moderate significance. Plot alone it is that can give to a novel substance and endurance. And a plot is always theoretical—hypothetical. The relating of events is theoretical, that is to say. It must be. A novel can never demonstrate anything whatsoever about life, because no novelist, nor any one else, knows the secret of life, the secret of how events are really related. If first a king and then a queen die, nobody can show with certainty that the two events are related. Will grief alone kill a queen? That nobody can explain. We all of us have to be content with belief and faith. And as every plot is in fact a relating of divers events, a plot is always a hypothesis. In novels, the principal element is the "fiction."

The value of the books I have so far discussed this evening lies, on the contrary, in their "truth." It is because of their "truth" that there is profit to be had from reading them. But, as I said earlier, there is another kind of biography, not direct biography, not biography written out of long and intimate acquaintance with the subject, but biography written by one who aims either to weld into a whole all the information that has accumulated concerning some great historical figure or else to set forth the significance of this figure for the time in which he lived, perhaps for all time.

The late Percy Allen, had his life been long enough to allow him to complete his monumental edition of the

Letters of Erasmus, intended to follow this up with a biography of Erasmus. We may be sure that had the biography been written, it would have come very near welding together *all* the information that is now available about Erasmus. So with the *Thomas More* of R. W. Chambers, which I named earlier. Now biographies of this kind the general reader may enjoy; he cannot tell if they are wholly or even partly accurate. Only a student of the period—say, Professor Preserved Smith or Dr. Kenneth Pickthorn—is equipped to point out that, for example, the late Professor Chambers has, either blindly or deliberately, omitted in his biography to refer to certain significant aspects of Thomas More—notably More's attitude to women.

This is equally true of the biography which seeks to set forth the significance either for his own time, or for our time, or for all time, of some great historical figure. Notable attempts of this kind are being produced to-day. The *Tennyson* of Mr. Harold Nicolson is an admirable though unpretentious example, and there is also Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence*, a study peculiarly interesting inasmuch as it propounds nothing less than a kind of individual religious doctrine. What general reader can venture to declare that either Mr. Nicolson or Mr. Huxley is a biographer deluded by his own fancies? Actually, the experts agree in saying that Mr. Nicolson's book is rustworthy, and some of them think that Mr. Huxley's eligious doctrine is, like most doctrines elaborated accord-ng to purely individual taste, questionable.

We see, then, that it is important for a reader who is in quest of profit to distinguish among biographies. As it is indispensable he should be able to recognize when a piece of writing is literature and when one is not, so it is indispensable for him to realize when the element of "fiction" and when the element of "truth" predominates, and when either is predominating in the right place.

The antithesis of "truth" and "fiction," and what it implies, we particularly require to keep before us in the

reading of books of history. There are two great English historians, Clarendon and Gibbon; and in great measure the two of them exemplify the difference between a preponderance of "truth" and a preponderance of "fiction." In *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702–04) a personal memoir is combined with a reasoned account of momentous events in which the author took part. Clarendon, in short, is really writing out of his own experience. Just as much as do Boswell or Lockhart, he writes out of first-hand knowledge. The personages who figure in his pages he had, most of them, both met and observed. He naturally makes no attempt to disguise his own opinions, either political or moral, but he cannot be said to have aimed at sustaining a particular thesis.

On the contrary, not only is Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766–88), writing of events which occurred centuries before he was born; a definite attitude or set of prejudices inspires and colours every one of his stately and sonorous periods. Of this the notorious fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the first volume, chapters purporting to account for the rise and spread of Christianity, are but a striking illustration. The *Decline and Fall* is as great in achievement as in scale. The design, the details, and the style are perfectly harmonized; the result is magnificent. Gibbon is both systematic in dealing with his material and fascinating in his narration. But all the time his purpose is to interpret as much as to chronicle. And while it is true that without the special knowledge which was the fruit of his gigantic labours of research the interpretation would have been impossible, it remains his personal contribution, the contribution of a single fallible and strong-minded individual.

It does not follow of course that the history written at first hand is better than the other. There may be good reason for preferring the intrinsic merits of Thomas More's *History of Richard III* (first printed 1543) to those of Burnet's *History of My Own Times* (1723–24), although it is true that More was not exactly in the position of

Gibbon, inasmuch as, far more than either John Foxe or John Aubrey, he based his record on a living tradition. What matters from the standpoint of us readers is that we should be clearly aware of what is "fiction," what "truth."

There will never be another Clarendon any more than there will ever be another Evelyn. The world has grown too complex and too hurried for any one mind to survey, to grasp, and to record comprehensively, the events of even a few years in the life of a nation. By the side of *The History of the Rebellion* or John Evelyn's *Diary*, the *Memoirs* of a Lloyd George, for example, are a mere fragment of the history of their day. We cannot do without history. Whether or not, as is claimed for it, it can account for the present by the past, and so lead us to understand the present, we need not discuss. We must learn about the past. And even though the great events of the past all raise perplexing questions, and it is possible to argue over those questions interminably, for the general reader to take part in arguing over them is futile. How could the general reader pick out truth from what Matthew Arnold described as "that huge Mississippi of falsehood called *history*"? At best the general reader can but accept with unreasoning docility some historian's answers to a few of them.

For doing so he can never have more solid ground than his liking for the narrative style of a particular historian or his feeling that a particular historian argues persuasively. But, after all, there is no real need for him to possess himself of absolute answers. It is enough that he should obtain some inkling of what has happened in the past, regardless of its true significance whatever that may be. And for this purpose books which make of history a colourful and fascinating narrative remain the most suitable—in other words, the most profitable—reading-matter.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that there has been a great advance in the writing of that sort of history. Professor A. J. Toynbee's *Study of History* (1938) or the *Blenheim* or,

more especially, the *Garibaldi* of Professor G. M. Trevelyan may be no more engrossing that Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837), Macaulay's fragmentary *History of England* (1848–61), or John Richard Green's *Short History of the English People* (1870). But there is no doubt that in each greater efforts have been made to present a balanced view and that to a great extent these efforts have been successful. Likewise the available sources have of late been widely extended. The history that is absorbing narrative is now extremely well documented, better documented than ever before.

The productions of a narrower but more minute scholarship the general reader will wisely neglect. Only curiosity can inspire those who, while not students of jurisprudence or students of what is now called political science, yet take up such a work as the *History of English Law before the Time of Edward I* (1895), although that magnificent fruit of research places its principal author, F. W. Maitland, on a level with the great historians of the Continent, Fustel de Coulanges and Leopold von Ranke.

BOOKS NAMED IN THIRD LECTURE

1. BIOGRAPHY

John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–74).
Morley Roberts, *The Private Papers of Henry Maitland.*
Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (1918).
Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (1921).
Lytton Strachey, *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928).
George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Thomas Woolsey* (1637).
Nicholas Harpsfield, *Life of Thomas More.*
A. F. Pollard, *Wolsey.*
Mandell Creighton, *Wolsey.*
R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (1935).
James Boswell, *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (1791).
J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1836–38).
John Foxe, *The Book of Martyrs* (1563).

John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (17th century).
Izaak Walton, *Lives* (1640 *seq.*).
John Morley, *Life of W. E. Gladstone* (1903).
Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson.*
Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence.*

2. DIARIES AND JOURNALS

The Diary of John Evelyn (17th century).
The Diary of Samuel Pepys (17th century).
George Fox, *Journal* (17th century).
John Wesley, *Journal* (18th century).
Fanny Burney, *Diaries* (18th century).
Crabb Robinson, *Diary* (1825).
The Greville Memoirs (19th century).
Captain R. F. Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery* (1913)

3. LETTERS

Letters and Papers of the Verney Family.
Memorials of the Verney Family.
The Paston Letters.
Horace Walpole, *Letters* (1820).
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters* (1763).

4. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian (1740).
J. H. Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864–65).
Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (18th century).
Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography* (1883).
Recollections (of the Peninsular War) *of Rifleman Harris* (1809).
Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Autobiography and Journals* (1853).

5. TRAVEL

Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832).
William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (1830).

A. W. Kinglake, *Eothen* (1844).
George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain* (1843).
George Borrow, *Lavengro* (1851).
George Borrow, *The Romany Rye* (1857).
George Borrow, *Wild Wales* (1862).

6. HISTORY

Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702–04).
Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766–88).
Thomas More, *History of Richard III* (1543).
Bishop Burnet, *History of My Own Times* (1723–24).
A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (1934–39).
G. M. Trevelyan, *Blenheim* (1930–34).
G. M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi* (1907–11).
Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837).
J. R. Green, *Short History of the English People* (1870).
T. B. Macaulay, *History of England* (1848–61).
F. W. Maitland and Sir Frederick Pollock, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I* (1895).

7. NOVEL

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield.*

FOURTH LECTURE

DEEP BOOKS AND DIFFICULT READING

BOTH novels, which we discussed in our second lecture, and the books we considered last week—biographies, diaries, histories, and so on—form in one sense a same class of literature. They are all works of narrative. We have still to deal with other writings—many of them in their turn works of literature—which are not narrative, but expository and argumentative; the word "argumentative" usually meaning persuasive as well. Such books are mainly about science, politics, or religion—subjects by nature abstruse. In general, narrative should be easy reading even as it should have proved to be the easier kind of writing. I do not suggest that to tell a story well is easy. I merely say that it is harder, requires more effort, to put an argument satisfactorily and tellingly into words; and it is less often achieved. And what it is hard to write is apt to be hard to read. Abstruse in subject, written with effort, the books in question may be appropriately called deep and the reading of them difficult. Two further kinds of writing which may be difficult reading are satire and allegory. Yet there is profit to be obtained from satire and allegory as much as from any other class of reading-matter, and some reference to them is not to be omitted.

Before I say any more, however, you may perhaps be asking yourselves why we should bother with deep books at all. Cannot difficult reading simply be avoided? The point is well taken and deserves to be met. The view we shall adopt entirely depends on the extent and quality of the profit that we want to get from our reading. Undoubtedly we may confine our reading to narrative and, provided we vary it sufficiently, still acquire a respectable and profitable acquaintance with literature. Walls of the

mind will duly be painted with pictures we can treasure. The memory will be stored with agreeable and—many of them—moving recollections. And very likely as a consequence our daily experience will be intensified and widened. There may even be considerable influence on character and conduct. So let us not imagine that it is impossible to profit from reading unless we are prepared to tackle deep books. The fact is, however, that our profit will be greater all round if at least some deep books do not intimidate us. On the one hand, there will be the additional profit obtainable from the difficult reading; on the other hand, we are likely to find that the profit which we obtain from reading narrative is increased both in extent and in quality when we do a certain amount of difficult reading as well.

Science, politics, and religion deal with matters which lie very close to the hearts of civilized human beings. Indeed, it has often been said that our natural curiosity is excited and some of our deepest feelings are stirred by nothing so much as by the problem of the ultimate purpose for which we are alive, the problem—that is to say—of man's end and destiny; and science, politics, and religion are all avenues to what have seemed tentative and partial solutions of different aspects of that problem. So it is that time and again in the past scientific and religious questions especially have roused human passions to a pitch of incredible violence, and politics and religion are still liable to excite strife at the present day. The Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century, what the Roman Church did to Galileo and Campanella in the seventeenth, the disputes between Huxley and the English bishops in the nineteenth —that is the kind of thing that has happened in the past. And the numerous political revolutions in Europe, China, and Central and South America, the persecutions of the Church in Russia and in Mexico, are instances of what has been happening in our own time. There is thus ample testimony to the importance of the contents of so-called deep books. And it is fair to ask ourselves if the difficulty of understanding and enjoying many of the deep books is a

sufficient reason why we should be frightened of them. I do not forget having said on a previous occasion that we should read nothing that bores us; and at first sight it might seem as if no reading could more surely bore us than the difficult. However, it is only when the difficult proves too much for us that it can produce boredom. So long as the difficult will yield to our efforts in the end, we are likely to find ourselves braced, not bored, by having tackled it. For that matter, it is now possible to avoid the difficult reading and yet to pick up something about the deep subjects.

No doubt politics and religion always were abstruse and complex, and within the last hundred and fifty years science has become extremely abstruse and complex. All three subjects are technical and difficult. But there have lately come forward—and they are coming forward in ever greater number—writers who expound one or another of these subjects clearly, simply, and with charm. Such writers treat science, or politics, or it may be religion, with due regard to the lack of specialization on the part of the average serious general reader, and they are usually careful to avoid any air of leading him out of his depth. These writers are called popularizers. In the subject of pure science it is only the work of popularizers that the average reader is likely to settle down to reading.

Needless to say, there are bad popularizers as well as good. But the good ones the public seems to be quite capable of recognizing for itself. It strikes me as only necessary to offer two warnings. In science as in other subjects popularization means simplification, and there is always the danger that a popularizer, through having over-simplified, will give his readers a distorted and misleading impression. In the domain of physics, for instance, how many laymen are perfectly clear in their own minds regarding the question whether or not atoms really exist? The danger of over-simplification is an insidious one. The reader of any work of popularization has necessarily to put a complete trust in his author. If he were able to check

his author's accuracy, presumably he would not be reading a piece of popularization. The only safeguard he can exercise is to be on the *qui vive* for any attempts at prestidigitation with the intricate, for that is where the misleading popularizer gives himself away. With a single exception, I do not propose to name any works of scientific popularization. Science changes so fast that such works are constantly having to be brought up to date when indeed they are not being superseded. But I feel I must refer to Professor A. N. Whitehead's little volume in the Home University Library—*Introduction to Mathematics*. For this work has long seemed to me to be a model of what popularization ought to be. It steers clear of the dangers of over-simplification and distortion by confining itself to an exposition of the preliminary fundamentals of the subject. Professor Whitehead in no way disguises the abstruseness and complexity of mathematics. He merely stops short of entering into them. At the same time nothing he says will fail to be of help to any reader deciding to go on to study the abstruse and complex details of mathematical science. Whenever a popularizer succeeds in being so truly introductory, the general reader can be confident that his trust in his author is not misplaced.

So much for my first warning. I shall now utter the second. The trouble with certain popularizers of physics or biology is not so much that they over-simplify as that they insist on implying that progress in their particular science sheds light on the problem of the nature and existence of God, on the problem of moral freedom, and on the possibilities lying in store for our posterity. A physicist may even go so far, when addressing the general public, as to declare that physics now determines which of two rival metaphysics is true. As such popularizers have usually won eminence in their own field, their curious attempts to magnify the importance of its researches are received with a respect which they do not deserve. The great strides being taken in physics, in astronomy, and even in biology, are fascinating enough in themselves for reading

about them to be of an all-sufficient interest to the public, so far as the public can understand them. And there is no need to stimulate interest by means of the condiment of either pseudo-philosophical implications or gratuitous prophecy. Prophecy depends for any possible accuracy on an understanding of philosophy. It is philosophy alone which can tell us what is within the possible for human nature either now or at any future time. Hence philosophy or metaphysics is in this respect the most fundamental of all sciences. And it is a subject for specialists. The physicist cannot expect to become a master of it simply by mastering his own subject; for, as Aristotle pointed out 2,500 years ago, metaphysics is concerned to embrace the whole range of human experience, and it is with only a portion of that experience that physics deals. It is therefore not open to physics to settle whether or not God has a mathematical mind, or whether realism or idealism is the true metaphysics. For the same reason it is not for the biologist to prophesy how man may be able to transform himself, since any transformation must depend on man's nature and that is something not studied by biology. On the contrary, it is to metaphysics that every other science has had to go for its own foundation and justification. The philosophy of physics and the philosophy of astronomy are not of much interest to the practical physicist or astronomer to-day. He can take them for granted. But physics would never have benefited by the strong forward impetus which it received at the end of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth had a certain metaphysical basis not been tacitly assumed by the pioneers of modern science. The general reader who is interested in obtaining light on this point may be referred to *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* by E. A. Burtt (1929).[1] It is only fair to say that not all eminent physicists who turn popularizers are guilty of dragging pseudo-theology or pseudo-teleology into their expositions of the more recent achievements in their science. One who

[1] Kegan Paul.

may, I think, be acquitted of this misleading irrelevance is Professor E. N. da C. Andrade.

Psychology and economics are two semi-scientific studies with which the general reader has lately felt he ought to have a nodding acquaintance. Psychology reached perhaps the height of its vogue immediately after the war of 1914–18, when people had grown desirous of throwing off the restraints of established morality and certain psychological theories seemed to justify a moral anarchy. Ten years later, what was known as the depression led the same people to feel that the key to social salvation was held by economics, and that if only they could obtain a smattering of the subject the advent of the millennium would be brought perceptibly nearer. I cannot help noticing that the most eminent economists are far from agreeing with one another, and perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are not requiring too much of them. I also cannot help voicing the suspicion that Plato in his *Republic*, written about 2,500 years ago, displays more understanding of the nature of the human soul than do some of the most renowned psychological theorists of the present day. In my opinion, experience of actual life and the reading of novels, biographies, diaries, and autobiographies are likely to give most of us a more practical grasp of the springs of both our own behaviour and that of the people around us than we are likely to obtain from the most strenuous study of treatises of psychology.

In any event the general reader does not expect books on psychology or books on economics to be literature. He does not even expect popular expositions of science to be literature, although in fact there is no cause to refuse that distinction to the popularizations made by a number of eminent physicists, astronomers, and biologists. But books on psychology and books on economics the general reader most certainly goes to asking only for information. Nevertheless, I may be allowed to mention that two such books, *The Principles of Psychology* by William James, and *The Principles of Economics* by Alfred Marshall (both 1890), are unquestionably pieces of literature. It is true that

James was an American, so that his writings must lie outside any consideration of strictly English literature, and also that a great deal of additional psychological theorizing has taken place since he wrote. An acquaintance with Marshall's treatise, however, is still looked upon as essential for any serious student of economics.

In that respect the treatise is exceptional. For light on scientific questions—and this is especially true of popularization—we normally go to the latest book; for in the natural sciences it is the latest discoveries, the latest theories, and the latest inventions, that matter most to the outsider. With politics that will not do. Politics is not a study built up, as are physics and biology, by hypothesis, experiment, and verification. Politics has constantly to appeal to its origins. It has to appeal to its origins, not because its practice is able to forgo the lessons obtainable from observation of the past, but because its practical scope in any particular circumstances must be governed equally by some end and by the recognizable limitations of human nature. The origins of political thought, so far as we Europeans are concerned, are two works of Plato—the *Republic* and the *Laws*—and one of Aristotle's—the *Politics*. If we wish to form sound and solid political views, we should read those three works first of all. Once we have done so, I do not recommend our going on to obtain a general smattering of subsequent political theory from manuals. There are of course plenty of popularizations of the science of politics. Many no doubt are admirable in their way. But I am not going to say a word about any of them. In my opinion, it will be more profitable for both our characters and our conduct, and above all for the quality of our own thinking, if, instead of going to popularizations, we read and re-read some of the writings that lie at the root of all English political theory. England, as it happens, can boast of four unquestioned masters of political thought. They are Edmund Burke, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Thomas More.

Burke, at the end of the eighteenth century, formulated once and for all what was to become the political faith of the

English Conservative. Conservatism is a doctrine easily misunderstood, especially by those people who are led by their generous feelings to enlist in the ranks of the political Left. Burke makes irrefragably clear the principles on which Conservatism is based. He supplies us with a standard of what political writing can be. If we read, not only his universally known *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), but also his *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), we shall have been put in possession of a complete political philosophy. Burke did not believe in the divine right of kings. But likewise he did not believe in the Rights of Man and the Citizen which the French Third Estate had formulated at Versailles in 1789. In the French Revolution he saw more than a challenge to monarchy. He saw in it a challenge to all political institutions. He had vision. A change in human thought was in process of taking place around him, and he saw whither it must lead. He was convinced that *it was mistaken.* He has not yet been proved wrong.

And not only is Burke a real *political philosopher.* He is also a writer of great literature. No doubt his style has defects that have been acutely exposed by Matthew Arnold. Yet those two works of his I have named—*Reflections on the Revolution in France* and *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*—possess all the virtue of statements by one who understands clearly both what he is opposing and what he considers to be right. He has genuine eloquence, the eloquence of passionate conviction. His rich imagery and his great rolling periods make him the peer of the outstanding stately writers of the two preceding centuries.

The *Reflections* elicited a host of replies. The most important is Tom Paine's popular pamphlet, *The Rights of Man* (1791–92). Owing to its fame, it is tempting to read it without preparation. I advise you not to do so till you have first read Burke.

A hundred years before the *Reflections* were written, John Locke published his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690). The importance of the book cannot be overestimated. It

came out at a time when doctrines of absolute power were in vogue, although the weight of sound opinion in the country had, by means of the Revolution of 1688, emphatically rejected them. The doctrines were based on an analogy of the king with the head of the family. Locke triumphantly refuted them. But he was not content to be merely destructive. He went on to put forward a theory intended to combine individual freedom with collective order. Thus the *Two Treatises of Government* contain the seed of those theorizings which, once they had been elaborated and further disseminated by the powerful pen of the Citizen of Geneva, Jean Jacques Rousseau, were to lead directly to the breaking out of that French Revolution which Burke so vigorously attacked.

The *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes (1651) contends in the main that there is no genuine alternative to social anarchy except absolute rule. "Leviathan" is the State. Hobbes elaborated his theory of the State neither from theology nor from tradition. He elaborated it from his observation of human nature and his study of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* of Thucydides. Before he sat down to produce his treatise, he had made three stays on the Continent. He had seen both the government of France and that of the Papal States at close quarters. The primary need of men is, he argues, to find security against one another. The state of nature is, he declares, a state of war. This state of war only passes into a political society once a form of Government is agreed upon. Because the state of nature is a state of war, government must have the power of coercion; and monarchy is the form of government least exposed to passion and least exposed to dissolution by civil war. The Sovereign is not a party to any social contract, but the outcome of such a contract whereby men in society undertake to suspend their normal rivalry, or, rather, to submit it to a supreme arbiter.

According to Hobbes, so long as they did not disturb the peace, the Sovereign should leave thought and conscience free. At the same time it is the duty of the State

to instruct its citizens what to believe in religious matters. Hobbes is no defender of the divine right of kings. On the contrary, not only in his view does a ruler not derive his sovereignty from God, but the government of the Church must be completely subordinated to the Civil Power. The Church is simply a spiritual guardian of the people. He was helped in promoting this doctrine by the belief that good and evil are essentially relative. Good, for him, is what gives pleasure, evil is what gives pain. That is a belief which had already been exploded in the fifth century B.C. by Plato in his *Republic*.

There is indeed in Hobbes much that can be disputed. He may be accused of exaggerating men's tendencies to anarchy. He overlooks the presence everywhere of morality. He overlooks the existence of the strong human impulse to mutual aid. In the world of seventeenth-century thought his position was a lonely one. It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that his views began to be properly appreciated, and it is only in the twentieth that they have actually been put into practice—in the authoritarian States. He has invariably been distasteful to churchman and dissenter alike. Moral and religious critics dismiss him with mingled anger and contempt. They declare that he is negligible as a writer. But that is sheer prejudice. He has the great and rare gift of making his meaning perfectly clear. He is ever struggling with words in order really to say something. His doctrine as a whole has never been satisfactorily refuted, and *Leviathan* remains one of the world's great books.

Hobbes is so fascinating a thinker that it is difficult not to go on talking about him. So with a very different man, Thomas More. In 1935, the year of the fourth centenary of his execution in the reign of Henry VIII, More was canonized in Rome, and he is now referred to as St. Thomas More. We may consider him, however, not as a saint, but as a writer. For above all he is a very great English writer. The late Professor R. W. Chambers has argued persuasively that it is in the English writings of More, and

not—as has been held—in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, that we should recognize the fount of modern English prose. According to Chambers, More's English is derived, as Malory's is not, from the English of centuries earlier. It is in the very centre of tradition. It is the bridge connecting Old and Middle English with the English of Shakespeare. More displays in his writings a brilliant turn for vivacious dialogue ; and another of our contemporary scholars, Dr. A. W. Reed, has shown that it is in the writings of More and his circle that we have the beginnings of modern English drama.

More's most famous political work, however, he wrote in Latin. It was in several respects a bold book to write in its day, and he wrote it in Latin partly in order to screen his criticisms of some recent measures taken in England. He wrote in Latin also because Latin was then the universal language of Christendom, and it was the whole of Christendom, the whole of Europe, that he wished his words to reach. If nevertheless we read this work in any of its English translations—Ralphe Robynson's (1551), Gilbert Burnet's (1684), or that by G. C. Richards (1923)—we are bound to recognize that, although written in Latin, it is the work of a thorough Englishman. The book itself is not as widely familiar as its title. Famous books seldom are. Its title is *Utopia*, a word that has passed into the language. Whatever we call Utopian is visionary, hare-brained, and deserving the disdain of practical politicians. In one sense this interpretation of More's Utopia is perfectly accurate. There is not the slightest likelihood that we shall ever see Utopia set up on earth. But in another sense to regard the political theories which More illustrates in *Utopia* as merely visionary or hare-brained is to perpetrate a grossly misleading caricature. Since More wrote, many of the social and political peculiarities of his imaginary commonwealth of Utopia have been adopted by modern human societies, and it is now being widely advocated that others should be adopted as soon as possible.

When More sat up of nights to write *Utopia* he had

certainly not seen that other equally famous and almost contemporary book, *The Prince* of Niccolo Machiavelli, although *The Prince*, first introduced to England, it is said, in 1515, was soon to be known there very widely indeed. Yet, in spite of this unawareness of More's, *Utopia* is in great part a retort to Machiavelli. To scepticism it opposes faith. In place of despotism it urges discipline. The commonwealth of Utopia is founded upon two dogmas, that of the immortality of the soul and that of the dignity of manual labour. Class distinctions are unknown there. It seemed to More that in a properly organized community every citizen should have time to work with his hands, to meditate, and to pray. In More's eyes, Europe, at the time he wrote, seemed to be nothing but "a conspiracy of rich men" procuring their own gratification; and he felt strongly that, even without the aid and support of Christianity, the world could have more justice and charity than there was to be seen in a Europe which was for ever calling itself Christian. But More never preaches. He inculcates his views by showing how he thought they would work in application. The constructive part of *Utopia*, the second part, is all compounded of vivid narrative and dramatic art. That is why, after four hundred years, *Utopia* remains fresh and new.

Closely connected with politics is the study called anthropology, the science of man, or, rather, that branch of anthropology which is known as folk lore. Admittedly it is a subject for specialists. But it comes within the purview of the general reader where it seems to shed light on the most ancient traditions of mankind and on man's most deeply ingrained habits and customs. Folk lore appeals to the general reader in appearing to lift a corner of the veil behind which lies a dark and primitive mystery—the mystery of the past of the human race. And in this domain it so happens that there is one book which has strong claims to be literature. It is a book written in our own day. I mean, the abridged version in a single volume of *The Golden Bough* by the late Sir James Frazer.

The Golden Bough is a monumental work which began appearing in 1890. It was only after its chain of volumes was at last complete that the author made an abridgement of them. This was published shortly before the outbreak of war in 1914. I do not think the general reader need bother about the complete work. It seems to me that the abridgement provides all he is likely to want to cope with. *The Golden Bough* is the result of long, patient, and immense research. Even in abridgement it wears an intimidating aspect. If, however, we take the plunge and settle down to read the one-volume version, we can be assured we shall find it as absorbing as a first-rate novel. It is an outstanding piece of prose composition, and one that our time may well be proud of. Not only does Frazer display in it something very near to narrative genius. His style abounds in felicitous imagery and illuminating parallels. It woos and wins the reader. And the theme, once we submit to its spell, is fascinating.

The numerous practices which it describes were obviously inspired by something elemental in primitive, or primitively civilized, man—a controlled and concentrated passion. These practices were sacrificial. They required a sacerdotal officiant and a scrupulous ritual. Yet perhaps the most eerie and disturbing feature of them is that many of them were performed by our own ancestors, by our own flesh and blood—human beings differing from us in their fundamental needs far less than we commonly realize, the people from whose loins we ourselves have sprung and whose apparently alien modes of thought and action were inspired by something that still runs in the blood of our own veins. *The Golden Bough* causes a reader to glance over his shoulder and to see that the primitive terror has dogged his steps down the ages : it is still there, just behind him.

When at last Frazer has reached the end of his long story, the turns of which carry the reader over tracts of space and time, he adds a short conclusion. It is this. The story of the Golden Bough, Frazer feels, exhibits man as having ever wanted to control nature. Originally man

strove to obtain this control by resort to magic. Later he sought the control through religion. Finally, a few centuries ago, he devised and adopted the methods of science —and this time he was rewarded at last with success. I cannot help finding this conclusion of Frazer's curiously unsatisfactory and disappointing.

No doubt it is indisputable that magic and religion are related; and also that magic is related to science. Magic and religion both aim at putting human beings in contact with the unseen. Magic and science both aim at a control over natural processes. But a very little reflection should be enough to show us that religion and science are totally unconnected, and also that the methods of magic and those of religion of entering into communication with the unseen differ from one another as radically as the methods of magic and those of science differ from one another for the control of nature. Actually, magic, religion, science, each has its distinct province, each its distinct purpose, each its own *modus operandi.* And there is nothing in these distinct provinces, purposes, and methods to warrant the hypothesis that at some time religion grew out of or superseded magic, or that at some other and later time science superseded religion.

To my mind, if the record of sacerdotal rituals set down in *The Golden Bough* points to anything, it is to something far removed from Frazer's own conclusion. The title of the book refers to the mistletoe. At Nemi, in Northern Italy, the mistletoe was the object of a special cult. It had its appointed sacerdotal guardian. And it was the fate of each guardian in turn to be slain by his successor. That is the dark horror of the story. Every priest of Nemi was foredoomed to the sacrificial knife. His vigil over the mistletoe was an anxious one, for it was always simultaneously a watch for his prospective murderer. In us of the twentieth century the bloody ritualistic custom inspires awe and even a vague dread. But nothing can explain it to us or account for it. Frazer, having narrated the dark events which once took place regularly at Nemi, goes on

to describe a great number of more or less related cults and rituals which were celebrated and performed at different times in various parts of the world. None of them, nor all of them together, authorizes that conclusion which in the end is all he has to offer in order to clothe them with significance. Every one of them, exactly like the dark and dastardly sacrifice at Nemi itself, remains inexplicable. To my mind, the account of them allows one inference, and one inference only. It is that deeply imbedded and ingrained in human nature are the craving and the incentive to come to terms of some kind with the unseen, and that the propitiation of the unseen requires the spilling of blood, a spilling of blood which is at once propitiatory, expiatory, and redemptive. How it ever came about that men were convinced of the existence of unseen powers and also of the existence of unseen divinities *The Golden Bough* does not tell us, nor how it ever came about that men were convinced of the need of sacrifice. Never in this world, indeed, are we likely to find out. The evidence required cannot by any possible stretch of the imagination be thought of as turning up. What we do have testimony of is the brute fact—the brute fact of the presence in the very depths of human nature of a need and an urge to make contact with the unseen and to propitiate that unseen—a need and an urge as elemental as hunger or sleepiness.

That is really, as I say, the only inference which it seems to me we are entitled to draw from the records set before us in *The Golden Bough.* Of course this inference we may either accept or reject. It is always possible for readers of *The Golden Bough* to prefer, in defiance of all reason, Frazer's own conclusion, the conclusion that religion has grown out of magic and science out of religion, all three being different methods adopted at various times by mankind in order to gain control of nature. Instead, however, the book may leave us with the feeling that although the religion of many different groups of men has been primitive and ingenuous, to be religious is nevertheless an essential human need. People who fail to experience the need must

then be regarded as to that extent humanly deficient, even as are the mentally defective and the callous. Whichever of these two opposite conclusions we adopt from a reading of the abridgement of *The Golden Bough*, once our reading of the works of the Greek and English masters of political thought has been supplemented by some reading of folk lore, and the sense of the eerie depths in all human nature is quickened in us, then, I suggest, is the time for satire.

The one great English satirist is Swift. Of course we have had other satirists as well, but Swift surpasses every one of them as Gulliver towered above the Lilliputians. Perhaps the best way of making the acquaintance of Swift is to read *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People from being a Burden to their Parents, or the Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Publick* (1729). The title is cumbersome, but the matter makes up for that in its lightness. The modest proposal, as some of us are no doubt already aware, is that the children of the poor should be slaughtered and sold for food. Having read Swift's *Modest Proposal*, we may read Swift's *Directions to Servants*. Every piece of slovenliness, sneaking, robbery, dirtiness, cheating, laziness, insolence and stupidity of which a servant ever has been and no doubt always will be capable, is included in these *Directions*, which, like *A Modest Proposal*, are put forward with a perfectly straight face. The two pieces, *A Modest Proposal* and the *Directions to Servants*, should show us, far better than could any definition, in what satire consists—satire combined with irony.

Irony always has two meanings—an apparent and a real one, and the latter is commonly the opposite of the former, although often not entirely so. Swift appears to mean seriously that the children of the poor should be slaughtered for food and that servants should behave in as slovenly a manner and as shabbily as they are able. Really he means nothing of the kind. But he does not simply mean in reality that the children of the poor should not be slaughtered or that servants should do their work decently. He

means that the indifference to, and neglect of, the children of the poor which were displayed by the rich of his day invited the putting forward of some such suggestion as he makes. He means, again, that the seemingly systematic slovenliness and dirtiness of servants invites the supposition that servants must imagine that is how they ought to behave. There lies the irony. And this irony is also satire, because Swift is obviously aiming, though no doubt with small hope of success, at reform. The province of satire is morals and manners. Its object is so to exaggerate as to rend our self-complacency and to explode our vanity. Turning a blind eye on our virtues, it shows us what a repellent and despicable animal man is, and leaves us to realize that each one of us is himself a man. If, however, the satirist were to take as his target ephemeral crazes, the mannerisms and foibles of the day, he would fail. He would produce not satire, but something considerably inferior. He would produce burlesque. Satire is only worthy of its name, it only truly attains its object, when it is directed at human nature itself and at modes of thinking, feeling, and acting that are perennially human.

A Modest Proposal and *Directions to Servants* are both contained in the Nonesuch Swift, which is edited by John Hayward. The same volume also contains a complete and carefully collated text of *The Travels of Mr. Lemuel Gulliver* (1726). That is Swift's masterpiece, and one of the greatest works in the English language.

But it must be read right through, and it is only the whole of it that can leave us with such an impression as the work deserves. To read of Gulliver's adventures in Lilliput and Brobdingnag—the subject of the first two sections—is not enough. In those adventures are satirized the English political life of Swift's own time, the institution of monarchy, the trappings of courts and courtiers, the rivalries and intrigues of favourites. That is to say, the two sections are in all conscience savage and devastating enough. And yet, by what must be rated a curious paradox, it is those first two sections which, appropriately

bowdlerized, furnish the material of a volume to be met with in nearly every English nursery. That this should have happened shows that the satire in them can be neglected. And as Swift was first and foremost a satirist, the popularity of the first half of *Gulliver's Travels* as a children's book is his complete misrepresentation. Therefore it is imperative we should read on.

We must accompany Gulliver to Laputa, and finally to the land of the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. In Laputa we find him in the midst of the frantic excitement of financial speculation. The objects of a great deal of research and inquiry are displayed in their idle if not pernicious folly. Inventions, plans and programmes of betterment, the pathetic faith in a mechanical and automatic progress, stand exposed in all their absurdity. Then Gulliver goes on to yet one more strange and remote country. And there indeed he does find a civilized society. But it is not human. It is a civilization of Houyhnhnms, philosophical horses. Two-footed creatures there are also, and they wear the outer semblance of men. But they prove to be an ignoble race of Yahoos, bestial in their passions and habits, and dragging out a degraded existence.

In this last ferocious fancy, it might seem that Swift's satire had over-reached itself; for in making his Yahoos bestial he is compelled to make his Houyhnhnms human. There is nothing but the human available for him to contrast the Yahoos with. But it is precisely through this touch of humanity in the superior animals that the satire is harmonized with reality. The reader is left confronted by the question: Why, if man aspires to be a Houyhnhnm, and to some extent is a Houyhnhnm, does he behave so much like a Yahoo? The question is one which must ever confront human beings. That is why *Gulliver's Travels* is permanent great literature. As a piece of craftsmanship it is superb. Every detail is to scale, and every detail is made to yield significance. But this craftsmanship would not be enough to assure the book its lofty place. It is, on top of the craftsmanship, the eternal timeliness of its

contents which does that. The other day I saw it said that Gulliver might be the work of someone fresh from beholding our own war-crippled world. There could be no better tribute to its immortal quality.

Once Gulliver is back in England, his recollections of the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos, at first overpowering, gradually grow weak, so that the closing pages have almost a touch of sweetness—a crowning touch of artistic fitness. Nevertheless, *Gulliver's Travels* is a devastating book. A reader who does not read satire with a shallow detachment, on whom it does not run off as water from a duck's back, but who recognizes its implications for mankind, and therefore for his individual self—such a reader cannot avoid being upset and shaken by it. Satire, especially the satire of Swift, makes the thoughtful, sensitive reader conscious, if only for a few fleeting moments, of the emptiness of human minds, the triviality of human pursuits. If only for a few fleeting moments, the serious reader stands face to face inside his own solitude with the dishonesty and self-deception of men, with the insincerity of their emotions, with their cowardice, with the folly of so many of their enthusiasms, and with the pettiness of their secret ambitions. And as the thoughtful, sensitive reader stands confronting all this inside himself, it is brought home to him with a pang that he is seeing his natural face in a glass.

It is, I suggest, in that mood that he may properly turn to the last of the kinds of writing I shall mention this evening. It is, I suggest, in that mood that he may properly turn to religious literature. Please do not let me at this point give rise to any misunderstanding. I do not mean to suggest that as soon as anybody has read *Gulliver's Travels* through to the end, he will feel that he must at once embark on a course of devotional reading. I only mean that it is probably a normal step to pass from a realization of the horror which satire pitilessly exposes and leaves exposed to some reading of that noble and impressive section of English literature which is constituted by the best of our religious writings. For that matter, in referring

to religious literature I do not necessarily imply devotional reading at all. That is entirely a question for individual choice. The main thing if we are to read for profit is, as I cannot insist too often, that we should read with gusto. Where a writer cannot be met half-way, where there is no instinctive sympathy, and not even curiosity regarding what he may have to say, the prospect of profit is slender. So, if it comes to that, it cannot be essential that there should be any reading of religious books at all. Unquestionably, we may become cultivated people without having done any such reading just as we may become cultivated people without having read any poetry. Culture—our own personal culture—must depend on our individual capacity.

Nevertheless, if we never read any religious books or if we never read any poetry, there will always remain a gap in our culture. In earlier lectures I referred to the formation of judgement and taste, to the need, if we are to read for profit, of our being able to recognize the presence or absence of the symptoms of literature in a book we happen to read. So long as we have never read any writings on religious subjects, or so long as we have never read any poetry, our judgement and taste cannot be regarded as being formed. That is to say, our enjoyment of any genuine piece of literature—and not necessarily of any deep book but even of any novel or biography which is literature—*will* not be so intense and deep as it might be. *In particular, some* of the religious literature in English—that is to say, some of the best books in English that deal with religion—have played a leading part in our history; they have helped to make Englishmen what they are to-day. To remain ignorant of them is to condemn oneself never to understand why Englishmen now think and feel as they do. Furthermore, much of our best literature in English consists of religious writings. We owe it to ourselves to know something of these writings in order that we may be aware of an important form of good English prose. Altogether, then, I recommend our reading some religious books. And, logically, the place for religious literature is imme-

diately after satire. For, surely, it is in the moment when we have grown acutely conscious of the horror which is produced by being confronted with the reality of our individual selves and of the selves of our fellow-men, when we have grown conscious of the vanity of our most cherished hopes and aims, it is then that the Houyhnhnm in each of us is likely to ask, even as Simon Peter asked: "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

I have spoken of religious literature. And by the term "religious literature" I do not mean popularization. To-day popularization has spread from science, not only to politics, but also to religion. Numerous expositions of theology, or of sections of theology, are being written for the general reader. To-day you can learn why you should go to church or why you should believe in God in less than a couple of hours. And there are also works of popularization for people who already call and profess themselves Christians. I do not wish to belittle such writings. Certain of them are obviously very able. Several may even claim to be literature. Frequently their readers may be assisted towards conversion or made into more devout churchgoers. But I am not concerned with them. Because, if we are going to read religious books the better to read generally for profit—and it is on that account alone that I mention such books at all—what we want to choose are acknowledged masterpieces. It is reading acknowledged masterpieces that will alone assist the formation of our judgement and taste. It is reading acknowledged masterpieces alone that will provide us with standards wherewith to evaluate our subsequent reading in general. As with politics, so with religion: our proper policy is to go back to the past.

And in this respect the past is very rich. As I said just now, much of our best literature in English consists of religious writings. Indeed, the past is so rich and varied that we may make a start in such a way as to avoid altogether any feeling that we are turning to a class of book we should never choose for the sake of "something to read" but are taking up in order to help to form our

literary judgement. As it is essential to read with pleasure if we are to read for profit, so it is best to read informally and spurred on by curiosity and suspense. And, when we turn to English religious literature, that is exactly what its variety and wealth allows us to do.

For instance, we may begin with David Hume's essay entitled *Of Miracles*. The essay forms part of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1758). Then we may also read Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). Hume, philospher and historian, is one of our very best English writers. His style has a delightful, an almost Continental, elegance. Moreover, he adopts a winning manner of appealing to the plain reasonableness of his reader. We shall find it hard—at least on a first reading—to resist the seductive grace of his language and the easy persuasiveness of his argument. So that it may easily seem that those two pieces of writing, *Of Miracles* and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, merely do one of two things—either confirm us in our scepticism or sow the seeds of scepticism in us. That indeed Hume seems to be a sceptic I shall not deny. I shall only say: Let each reader decide for himself. But even if Hume is no more than a sceptic, it has to be borne in mind that here, as elsewhere, extremes tend to meet. Scepticism may be very near to faith. As Browning says:

> How can we guard our unbelief,
> Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus ending from Euripides—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as Nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring
> Round the ancient idol, on his base again.

Virginia Woolf once called Sir Thomas Browne "one of the keepers of the keys of solitude." It is a good description. Three of his writings well exemplify that neighbourliness of scepticism and faith. As the title of

one of them—*Religio Medici*—indicates, Sir Thomas Browne was a doctor. *Religio Medici* first appeared in print with its author's sanction in 1643. *Christian Morals* and *Hydriotaphia, or Urn Burial*, were only published after his death, which occurred thirty-nine years later—in 1682.

It is indisputable that in all three of these writings we are carried into the heart of religious thought and feeling. At the same time the presence of scepticism is equally apparent. Sir Thomas Browne could be sceptical while never relinquishing his faith because he was one of those rare beings who realize that the prosaic is really astounding. To him his own life was a continuous "miracle." The description seemed excessive to Dr. Johnson till he reflected that, after all, in one sense "all life is miraculous." Dr. Johnson was a truly religious man, but it required a Sir Thomas Browne to realize that great truth of his own accord. In Browne the scepticism is ever mingled with kindliness and simplicity. The strongest characteristic of his admirable prose is an unflagging whimsicality. This whimsicality displays itself in a jesting earnestness.

There are, I know, people who loathe ambiguous, half-hidden jokes. Jokes of that kind seem to make them feel that they are somehow being ridiculed. I am sorry for them. But I myself side with the other people who understand that it is what a man is most serious about, what he respects most deeply, that he can most aptly laugh at. It is only through laughter that he can succeed in speaking of them. You know the story of the English visitor to Paris who went to listen to the singing of the Benedictine nuns and was shocked to see that during the celebration of Mass in the chapel people came and went and that in particular one woman, after arriving late, prodded the priest's server on his knees at the side of the altar with her umbrella in order to ask him if she had missed the Epistle. Back at home, the English visitor described his experience to a friend who was a Roman Catholic. "Ah, my dear fellow," was the reply, "you mustn't mind that. It only means that Catholics on the Continent feel at home in church." Sir

Thomas Browne was at home with whatever he was most serious about, and so he was able to be earnest jestingly.

"We term sleep a death," he says, "and yet it is waking that kills us, and destroys those spirits that are the house of life." But he continues: "'Tis indeed a part of life that best expresseth death, for every man truly lives so long as he acts his nature." Again he says: "Even that vulgar and Tavern Musick, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion." Again: "What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among Women, though puzzling Questions, are not beyond all conjecture." And just one very short passage:

> But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her Poppy and deals with the memory of Men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the Founder of the Pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the Temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it; Time hath spared the Epitaph of Adrian's Horse, confounded that of himself.

"Who can but pity the Founder of the Pyramids?" Isn't that delightful? The writings of Sir Thomas Browne abound in observations as good, observations that no other pen has matched. And it is through such observations that he enables us to see why he was a religious man.

From writings such as *Religio Medici*, *Christian Morals* and *Urn Burial*, we shall realize the attitude of mind in which we can feel desire to understand the theory that underlies our having in England an Established Church. There is something to be said for being quite clear about this in our minds before we offer suggestions, as many people glibly do, for ecclesiastical reform. The book which expounds this theory most comprehensively, and was the first book really to expound it at all, is *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* by Richard Hooker (1594–97 and 1648–62). For elegance and nobility of language, Hooker ranks as an English Cicero. He writes with a calm and dignity that often rise to grave eloquence. His great and monumental work—it runs to eight books, published one at a time—sought to provide the foundation for a *via media*

which would avoid both the fanaticism of the Puritan and the exorbitance of the Papist. It was undertaken at a time, in the reign of Elizabeth, when the Puritans were trying to get Parliament to enact that the national Christian worship should be Calvinistic. It exposes the fallacies inherent in the arguments that were invoked to support this attempt. The Puritans took the Mosaic law as the standard of criminal jurisprudence and the practice of the Apostles for an unerring and immutable rule of discipline for the Christian Church. Hooker does not quarrel over texts of Scripture. He inquires instead into the nature and foundation of law itself, especially the laws which regulate human action as this action arises out of moral relations. Having established that there are distinctions between laws natural and positive, eternal and temporary, immutable and variable, he brings all the force of his moral philosophy to bear on the discrimination, by means of the same criterion, of the various rules and precepts that are set forth in the Scriptures.

Hooker vindicates the royal supremacy over the Church in England, and in doing so he may seem to side in advance with Hobbes. But we do not have to be at one with Hobbes in order to see that it may be best for the sovereign of a temporal state to be also the head of the Church in that state. Hooker vindicates the royal supremacy by identifying the Church with the Commonwealth. In temporal matters, indeed, Hooker has been found to agree most nearly with Locke. He holds that there is a primary social contract, and that the assent of all men is requisite for what they are bound to.

The last three of the books of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* were published years after Hooker's death. The best and most important of all eight is considered to be the fifth, which he himself saw published in 1597. We may shrink from reading through all eight books, but at least we should read that one. It will show us what great religious literature in English is. That is why I recommend the reading of any of the work at all ; that and the light

shed on disputes which have had so much to do with moulding the nation into the form it has to-day. I do not recommend *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in the belief that the reading of it might result in a conversion to the Church of England. James II declared that it was this and another book which determined him to embrace the Church of Rome!

A large part of religious literature consists of collections of sermons. Such volumes are doubtless not widely popular nowadays, and yet those sermons which have continued in print for one or more centuries can still show us how our language may be applied to the kindling of men's hearts over questions of morality and feeling, the most difficult questions to speak about, to find words for. The most celebrated collections of sermons in English are probably those of Jeremy Taylor (1650 and 1651). The language is simple and flowing, and rises at times to lyrical heights. The meaning is direct and clear. *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651) by the same author is a work which is still being read, because it displays the same qualities.

John Donne, who was made Dean of St. Paul's in 1621, has recently become—thanks in great part to the editorial and critical labours of Sir Herbert Grierson—a fashionable poet. It is not to my purpose here to speak of his poetry, and I am not going to say anything about the apparent carelessness of his diction or about his resort to intricate and unexpectedly remote metaphor. He did succeed in making spiritual and carnal feelings vivid by referring to them in concrete, tangible images. As, however, he is now a fashionable poet, we may want to read his poetry, and we cannot obtain a more suitable volume for this purpose than the Nonesuch Donne, edited, like the Nonesuch Swift, by John Hayward. Now, if we get hold of this volume, we shall find that, in addition to his poetry, it contains some of his sermons. And so we might well read them.

They can be contrasted with the sermons of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, who died in 1616. The sermons of Andrewes are less accessible, and it is likely that most

readers to-day would not take to them. Yet, whereas the preaching of Donne may appropriately be called rhetorical —that is to say, it stirs our feelings directly—the preaching of Andrewes is more intellectual, and should therefore move its readers in the end more deeply.

The *Sermons* (1726) of Joseph Butler are addressed to the educated mind. Much wider is the appeal of the *Sermons* which John Henry Newman delivered as a member of the Church of England before his conversion to Rome in 1845. Newman is the master of a nervous, poignant, and harmonious prose, probably the finest prose of the nineteenth century. He himself declared that he had never striven to achieve a style, but had ever only sought to set down his meaning as simply and clearly as possible. In the words of *Alice in Wonderland*, he had taken care of the sense, and left the sounds to take care of themselves ! The adage sums up the whole art of writing, and here the result is that Newman's style is altogether admirable while still being the voice of the living man. As we read, we seem to hear him actually speaking, speaking in accents that palpitate with feeling and pierce the heart.

I cannot leave the subject of religious literature, even though I am only touching on it, without mention of one particular devotional book. It is a book which may now seem difficult reading. Yet only the other day it was being described as " a book of extraordinary power, persuasive style, racy wit, and unanswerable logic." [1] Certainly its pages are no more difficult than many to be met with in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a work that has lately re-become a best seller in England. This book is William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728). William Law the man was praised by Gibbon, the sceptical historian. William Law the author was praised by Macaulay, the champion of history as " true romance." And both man and author excited the appreciation of Leslie Stephen, who looked upon himself as an agnostic. *A Serious Call* was written in order to show that

[1] The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 494.

we do not attain to leading a Christian life merely by assenting to doctrines and by taking part in ceremonies. We can only do so by a complete reorientation of both our outlook and our behaviour. With a sure touch, the book lays bare the inconsistencies of our ideals of conduct. It has exerted a long and wide influence. Dr. Johnson said that it gave him his first serious religious convictions; and Dr. Johnson was an earnest Christian, a man who held to the Christian faith with all the tenderness and seriousness of his great character. It was an inspiration to John Wesley; and in that way it may be said to have contributed most, after the Bible, to the rise and spread of Methodism in particular and of Evangelicalism in general. Unquestionably, if we want a standard of literature we cannot do better than seek it in *A Serious Call.*

I have now spoken of books about science, of books about politics and folk lore, of satire, and of books about religion. And yet, except for a passing reference a moment ago, I have not mentioned the Bible, in its Authorized Version the greatest book in the English language. Of the Bible, however, I intend to say something in the next lecture, when we are to consider good and better writing —or, if you like, style. This evening I conclude by naming a book directly inspired by the Bible, or, rather, by the Gospel; a book constantly referring to Scripture; a book whose characters, scenes, and very phrases are a national possession. It is my one example of allegory. I am referring of course to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). I began this evening by saying that satire and allegory may be difficult reading. Of satire we may still consider this to hold. But the earnest simplicity of Bunyan's writing proves that in at least one instance it is not true of allegory. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is so easy to read that it has not needed to be bowdlerized, as has *Gulliver's Travels*, in order to reign on the nursery bookshelf for generation after generation. Yet if it is a children's book, we shall discover, when we go to it as adults, that it fully repays adult attention.

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FIFTH LECTURE

GOOD AND BETTER WRITING

He is to be frequently on deck in the day, and at all times, day and night, when the hands are employed. Assisted by his Mates, he is to see that the men severally go quickly on deck when called, and do their work well and with alacrity.

Before 8 a.m. of each day, and more frequently when necessary, in reference to the service on which the ship is employed, he is to examine carefully the state of the rigging, and report the result to the Officer of the Watch, so that immediate steps may be taken to repair or replace whatever requires to be so dealt with. He is to see that the anchors are secure, and is to take care to keep a sufficient supply of mats, plats, rubbers, points, and gaskets ready for immediate use; that the booms and boats are secure, and that, so far as may depend on him, the boats are ready for immediate service, and the gear in good order and constantly rove.

These words form a passage from "Instructions for the Boatswain" in the *Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions* for 1863.

Again:

On Z day, the date of which will be notified later, the Army will take the offensive. The object is to inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy, and to advance to the general line of the high ground Meshariq Nablus — Yasid (098.L.9) — Sh. Beiazid (098.K.9) — At'ara-Jebel Bir Asur (098.B.25) — Bala (098.A.22) — Yemma (083.N.26).

(*a*) The main attack will be made by the XXI Corps with five divisions against the enemy's right between the foot-hills east of the railway and the sea. This attack will commence on Z day at an hour which will be known as "XXI Corps zero hour."

(*b*) As soon as the crossings over the Nahr el Faliq are cleared of the enemy by the advance of the XXI Corps, the Desert Mounted Corps, passing round the left of the XXI Corps, will be directed on El 'Affule and Beisan with the object of cutting the enemy's railway communications and blocking his retreat in a northerly and north-easterly direction.

(*c*) As soon as the XXI Corps has gained the general line Three Bushes Hill (04/N.25)—High ground 03/K.14—Foothills east of Quadquilye—North-eastern edge of Et Tire (D.3/Y.13)—north bank of the Nahr el Faliq, it will move north-eastwards and advance to seize the high ground east of the railway between Deir Sheraf and 'Atara.

(*d*) " Chaytor's Force " will hold the present front in the Jordan Valley, and may be required later to advance as far as Jisr ed Damiye.

This is part of the text of a document headed : " XX Corps Operation Order No. 42." It is dated 13 September, 1918. It is signed by the B.G.G.S., XX Corps. To-day that B.G.G.S. is Field-Marshal Lord Wavell.

It may strike you as odd that I should begin a lecture on good and better writing with a quotation from Instructions to the Boatswain and have followed it with one from a Corps Operation Order drawn up in Palestine in 1918. The point of this beginning will appear in a moment. In the meanwhile we may perhaps best prepare ourselves for understanding the point of it by asking why and how good writing is important.

So far in these lectures, our quest for symptoms of literature has led us to consider in the main how the symptoms are displayed in the contents of books. We have seen what certain books are about. We have noticed the quality of their matter. But symptoms are also shown in the manner. It is always its meaning and significance that are to be sought in what a book says. Yet the way this is said is equally of effect. For by the expression " the way in which what a book has to say is said," or, in a word, the manner, we must understand a good deal. There is the spirit in which a book is written, the tone and temper pervading it. There is the way it begins, and the way each chapter begins. There is its manner of leading up to a conclusion. There is its preparation of the reader for some capital utterance or for the narrating of some decisive event. There is the choice of what is dwelt upon at length and of what is passed over briefly. In works of narration there is the ordering of the narrative. In exposition and in

argumentative writing there are order, clarity, and persuasiveness. In all writing there is the way the reader's attention and interest are first won and then retained. All that may be termed the manner in contrast to the matter, and the science and art of it all will repay study. The more we understand this science and this art the greater may be the profit which we shall derive from our reading.

Walter Pater once pointed out that to go behind the effects which the reading of any notable book has upon us and to see how those effects have been contrived is to enjoy reading so much the more. The study of the science and art of that contrivance in general will enable us to obtain from our examination of a particular author's methods and devices a special pleasure which is like nothing else. For instance, it is instructive and may benefit the whole of our reading to look into the contrivances of a novel by Thackeray and to discover that as Thackeray excels in preparing his reader for some big scene, so he never altogether succeeds in treating a big scene itself as it deserves. The American novelist Edith Wharton, in a book which she called *The Writing of Fiction*, dwells on an incident in *L'Education sentimentale*, a remarkable novel by the Frenchman Gustave Flaubert. The hero, having been in love with a woman, is then driven apart from her by circumstance. One day, however, chance brings them together again, and the hero feels all his old passion revive. The woman has her hat on, and she does not seem to him to have greatly changed. But presently in the lamplight she takes off her hat, and he sees that her hair is nearly white. To him the sight of this is like a blow. My point is that if we study how incidents such as this one are brought into a novel and are told, described, we are not only learning something about the composition of novels; we are also being given sudden flashes of feeling about life itself. And if to study story-telling can be instructive, so too, at least sometimes, the examination of a piece of expository or argumentative writing can be instructive. It will repay us to see how the author has selected and arranged his detail so that this

detail conveys the maximum of enlightenment, to see how the argument is marshalled so that its weaknesses are masked and the reader is swayed into agreement. Indeed, if we are to test the validity of the argument, it is essential to do this. Some writers—Gibbon is one of them—disarm the reader by an imposing appearance of system, by the dividing up of a piece of exposition under various heads, and also by means of touches of scepticism and touches of irony. All these contrivances and devices are used in order to have their effect on the reader, and when we go behind an exposition or argument and analyse it into its elements, we are learning something about our instinctive responses and seeing how we should be on guard against implicitly trusting them. We are getting to know ourselves. If we persevere in the exercise, a time will come when we can judge the quality of a narrative or of a piece of exposition or argument. And that is a great step forward in the formation of our literary taste. It is impossible to decide on the value of a book as a whole unless we can clearly judge the quality of the manner.

This evening I am not going to speak about manner in general. I am only going to speak about one ingredient of manner—about style, or the quality of the language which is employed in a piece of writing. We could make no greater mistake than to suppose that this question of style is one for specialists, one that the ordinary reader may safely neglect. Often when we are reading, and particularly if we are reading a book for the first time, it seems to us that our attention is wholly concentrated on the matter —on what the book has to say. But in reality even then we are far from indifferent to the language of the book —to the choice of words, their meaning, their sound, their associations, the choice of metaphors and similes, the choice of illustrations. At the very least we shall be struck by the form of occasional phrases and sentences. That is how it is that so much of the Authorized Version and so much of Shakespeare have passed into the language—the common language of every day. It has seemed to readers of the

Authorized Version and of Shakespeare that here was a good way of saying something, and they have used those turns of phrases, those sentences, themselves. The phrases and sentences have stuck in the memory of readers. Those readers have come to quote them, and this has gone on for generation after generation till at the present day we speak in phrases, and sometimes sentences, of the Bible or of Shakespeare, and may be unaware, or at least forgetful, of their origin. It is also because readers were struck by the quality of an occasional phrase or sentence that we have come to have quotations. "My days are swifter than the weaver's shuttle." In spite of the visible speed of aeroplanes and the ascertained speed of light, there is still no improving on that image. "Love comforteth like sunshine after rain." The sentence has a coolness and freshness that are themselves comforting. "Must I hold a candle to my shames?" Electricity and searchlights do not provide a more effective metaphor. They cannot suggest, as the candle does, something that is only seen distinctly, only exposed, when a light, however feeble, is brought near it. The question, "Must I hold a candle to my shames?" makes the shames like the features and complexion of a woman no longer young: the woman would prefer that they were not examined too closely. But good writing is more than an effective use of metaphor and simile. The choice and arrangement of words in the most matter-of-fact sentence can render that sentence enjoyable to read and to repeat, and, because thus enjoyable, memorable also.

However, what we are concerned with this evening is more than felicity of expression—admirable and important as that is. And here we come to the reaso why I began this lecture by reading to you, first passage from "Instructions for the Boatswain," an then a passage from an Army Corps Operation Orde I read those passages to you because they are bot of them admirable samples of prose adequate to it purpose; and adequacy—suitability, appropriateness—i

really the essence of good writing. Accordingly, it is what we are to consider in this lecture.

I find the two passages in an anthology entitled *The London Book of English Prose*. It is an anthology with certain peculiarities. It is not only a compilation of prose extracts: the selections are grouped under a succession of various heads—narrative, scientific and emotive prose—these main sections being sub-divided in turn into story-telling, history, biography, philosophy, theology, politics, criticism, drama, oratory, and so on. The anthology was produced by Messrs. Herbert Read and Bonamy Dobrée. They set to work on the principle that "there is a prose for every occasion," and that "the kind of prose, its appropriateness and its worth, will vary with each occasion." I cannot do better than read to you a few words from their introduction:

> Surely, it will be said, the lyrical utterance of Jeremy Taylor, the impassioned eloquence of Edmund Burke, or the tense narrative of Edgar Allan Poe, is not to be compared with the humdrum *Instructions to the Boatswain!* Not, we will admit, in the scale of values which governs ethics; but then, instructions issued to boatswains in the periods of Taylor or Burke would be absurdly inappropriate. Yet the boatswain must have his instructions, and these instructions must achieve their purpose. The statesman who sways his audience by his oratory, and the authorities who instruct their boatswains, are using this same instrument, prose; the success of both is measured, not by the gravity of their charge, but by the effectiveness of their communication. Style, it cannot be too often repeated, is not an ornament; it is not an exercise, nor a caper, nor complication of any sort. It is . . . the knowledge of what one wants to say, and the saying of it in the most fitting words.

Style, I may add, is also something else. In fact, Messrs. Read and Dobrée declare it to be also "the sense of one's self." But perhaps the phrase "the sense of one's self" is not as immediately intelligible as they imagine. It calls, I feel, for a good deal of qualification and the drawing of some possibly subtle distinctions. I fancy it is at once better and more simple to say that style is sincerity. From the standpoint of a reader of prose, the

meaning of the word " sincerity " is unmistakable. It was evident as I read their words just now that the anonymous author of " Instructions for the Boatswain " and Brigadier-General Wavell, as he was then, each meant every word of what he said. It was likewise evident that the words they used were their own. That is to say that altogether it was evident both were sincere.

Incidentally, from the wording of the operation order we saw something more. We saw that there is really no compulsion upon a soldier to resort in writing to the jargon and bad grammar, to say nothing of the wayward spelling, which combine so effectively to disguise the sense of many of the more fugitive military documents. Before our sincerity can bestow quality upon even our most ordinary pieces of writing, we need an elementary knowledge of English. We need to know, for instance, that " due to," when used adverbially, is *not* English. As the late H. W. Fowler remarks in his invaluable and constantly entertaining *Modern English Usage :*

> *Due to* is often used by the illiterate—notice he says " the illiterate "—as though it had passed, like *owing to*, into a mere compound preposition. *Due*, like ordinary participles and adjectives, must be attached to a noun and not to a notion extracted from a sentence.

But that is by the way. As regards sincerity in writing, I see no need for us to have a definition of it. The lasting enjoyment of pieces of literature, or, in other words, reading for profit, is not to be made automatic by the learning of a set of definitions, which, having learned, we could hold pat for instant application whenever we opened an unfamiliar book. Even in a rigorous science like geometry, we do better to learn how to reason proofs than simply to learn the proofs themselves. And what we require in order to read for profit is not any attribute of the parrot, but an eye, a flair, for the symptoms of literature. So recognition of the presence of sincerity in a piece of writing is no matter of recalling some definition and then trying to ascertain if its terms are complied with. The presence

of sincerity is properly apprehended in an intuition. Yet although the act of recognition is intuitive, there is nothing recondite in what has to be recognized. If a writer knows what he wants to say and finds the most fitting words in which to say it appropriately to his particular purpose, there will be no occasion for him to lapse into insincerity. It is the writer confused or vague in mind and indigent of vocabulary who finds sincerity beyond him.

So much for that something else which style also is. But in the first place, as we have seen, style is the combined result of knowing what has to be said and the saying of it in the most fitting, the most appropriate words. Let us return to the principle applied by Messrs. Read and Dobrée to the arrangement of their anthology, the principle that " there is a prose for every occasion." This principle or axiom carries with it an important implication or corollary. There is a prose for every purpose. That must imply that the quality of any given piece of prose is inextricably involved with its purpose or meaning. Only too frequently nowadays the word " literature " is used as if there were such a thing as good writing *in vacuo*, good writing entirely independent of the occasion which brought it into existence and entirely independent of its subject-matter. That won't do. Quite obviously, it is nonsense. The lyrical utterance of Jeremy Taylor would be absurdly inappropriate to the humdrum " Instructions for the Boatswain." But, far more than that, the utterance of Jeremy Taylor never would become lyrical so long as he were instructing boatswains. It is from the purpose, and with the purpose the meaning, that prose acquires its quality. That is to say, although the best matter will not necessarily call forth the best writing for its expression —and a noble theme does not automatically make a great writer—we never get good writing that is not the perfect garment—the exact reflection—of its matter. It follows that good writing can never truly be found good in divorce from what it is about. If, regardless of what it is about, we feel it to be good, we are not really being affected

by it, or, at best, we are being affected by only a part of it.

This is the point at which I want to speak—as I announced last week I would speak—of the Bible. Some years ago there appeared a book entitled *The Bible as Literature.* As might be expected, it was an American production. It is no reflection on the many great virtues of the American people—virtues familiar to all who have benefited by the American exercise of one or more of them—to recognize that with those virtues at least some Americans combine a propensity to embrace erratic notions. America is the country of new and pseudo religions, the country of feeding fads and experiments in freakish communal living. Especially is it the country of a hollow spirituality, which, because hollow, is rather terrifying. If, however, the book entitled *The Bible as Literature* was prepared in America, it was published in England as well. England for many years has been in process of being Americanized, and it is as well to realize that the Americanization is not being effected only by means of the cinema. The importation of certain American books also plays its part. And to me it seems that, in particular, the appearance in England of the book called *The Bible as Literature* has been at once a portent and a warning. For of course the book is not the Bible as we know it in either the Authorized or the Revised Versions. Admittedly, it contains the greater part of the Bible, but the text is edited and arranged with a special object in view. The editor and arranger wished to emphasize a so-called literary aspect of the Bible to the exclusion of any other. That is to say, in this volume the Bible is set before us as being poetry, as being narrative or story-telling, as being exhortation, regardless of the religious element. There was a time when the Bible was widely read in England, and, for good or ill, that time is no more. Nowadays people do not read the Bible. They do not read it for the simple reason that they are not religious. The editor of the book which he has called *The Bible as Literature* supposed that people might now

brought to read the Bible as their fathers did, even though, unlike their fathers, they are not religious. He supposed that they could be brought to read the Bible for the sake of the language in which it is written, and for the sake of this language alone. In short, he went very near to supposing that literature is no more than fine language. He fell into the fallacy of imagining that there are such things as poetry, narrative or story-telling, and exhortation, which are open to being enjoyed and are worth appreciating in complete obliviousness to what they are about, in complete obliviousness to their significance or meaning—poetry, narrative or story-telling, and exhortation *in vacuo*.

I say this is a fallacy. And it is my business to show you why. We all know that the Bible has been a tremendous influence in the forming of what I may call the English tradition, and I think the easiest way to see that the notion of a poetry, a narrative or story-telling, and an exhortation existing *in vacuo* is fallacious, is to consider how the Bible has had this influence. I uttered last week, and I now repeat, the commonplace that the Bible in the Authorized Version is the greatest piece of literature in English. In evidence of that there is, first of all, its influence on the language. Few of our writers have missed the good fortune to be inspired by it to their own benefit. It does not matter that some of our writers have steeped themselves in the forms of expression used in the Bible while others have only dipped in them. Many writers have been influenced by these forms of expression none the less indelibly for having undergone their influence only at second hand. The beauty of those forms of expression is felt at first contact. With those of Shakespeare, they have come to constitute the fountain-head, so to speak, of oral English. Generations ago they passed into the vocabulary of ordinary men and women, and they have remained the foundation of their vocabulary down to the present day. All this, we may be sure, would never have happened if the Authorized Version had not contained

very fine poetry, stirring narrative, impassioned exhortation. And, incidentally, there are obvious advantages in reading the poetry of the Bible as it is printed in the Revised Version, a typographical arrangement which has been followed in the volume called *The Bible as Literature*—followed and extended. But the point is: What can we mean by poetry, by narrative, by exhortation?

The late Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, for so long Professor of English Literature at Cambridge, says—I think it is in his lectures collected in volume form under the title *On the Art of Reading*—that for two years he devoted half an hour of every day to reading the Authorized and the Revised Versions side by side, noting where they differed and trying to make up his mind which rendering was the better. We may be confident that any one who followed his example would thereby go far towards becoming a cultivated reader. We may be confident this assiduous reading of both English versions of the Bible would be reading for profit. For it is not the number of books we read that regulates the extent of our profit from reading. *Timeo hominem unius libri*, said St. Thomas Aquinas. "I fear the man of one book." He meant that the redoubtable adversary is not the man who has read widely, but the man who has read well; the man who has mastered perhaps no more than a single book, but really has mastered it. It goes without saying that when anybody decides to study so intensively one particular book, he should select a book that will be worthy of the labour he proposes to lavish on it. If Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch had been able to look upon the Bible as no more than literature in the sense in which it is literature for the man responsible for the volume called *The Bible as Literature*, we may be sure he could never have brought himself to such assiduity in the reading of it. Nor could any one of us be so assiduous if we felt inclined to imitate him.

At this point I must ask you to be careful not to misunderstand me. I am not in the least suggesting that we can only read the Bible with profit provided we accept

the claims which are made for it. The real nature of the good writing contained in the Bible has nothing to do with questions such as whether or not the matter conveyed in this manner is inspired or true, and whether or not a reader of the Bible holds, or thinks he holds, the Christian faith—at least, nothing directly. I simply mean that to admire the writing of the Bible while ignoring what the Bible is about is fatal to any reading of the Bible for profit. In order to read the writing of the Bible with profit we must appreciate, consciously or unconsciously, the quality of this writing. And, as I have said, it is from the purpose for which a piece of prose is penned, and from, with the purpose, its meaning, that the piece of prose acquires its quality. Hence good writing can never truly be found good in divorce from what it is about. Hence, if we are to profit from reading the Bible, we need to feel what it is that inspired the translators of the Authorized Version to their felicity of expression. But to feel this is not necessarily to share their beliefs. The feeling has a wide range of degrees, and we may realize the extent of the range by considering the various attitudes of people when they go into a church. Some unaccompanied singing of words put to music by Palestrina attracted a great crowd to a midnight mass one Christmas Eve in New York. Every seat was filled, and there were twice as many people standing as were seated. When the preacher appeared in the pulpit, thereby showing that the singing was over, there was some noisy scrambling for the doors. Suddenly the voice of the preacher thundered out: "What are those people doing? This is the House of God, and it is not going to be treated as if it were Grand Central Terminal!" The words made those departing stop in their tracks. They understood that they had been lacking in respect to the priests and congregation. Yet we may suppose that many of those persons who, on seeing the preacher appear in the pulpit, had made no move to leave were not Roman Catholics any more than the noise-makers. But at least they did remember, as the noise-makers apparently did

not, that a midnight mass consists of something besides the unaccompanied singing by boys. What we need to understand about the Bible if we are to read it for profit is closely akin to this.

You may remember that in speaking of the novel, I said that every novel, at the same time as it is a combination of elements each of which can be analysed in isolation, is in reality an inseparable whole, so that it fails as a whole if it fails in any of its elements. This is true of more than novels alone. It is true of every piece of writing, and is a main reason why so few pieces of writing are literature. Hence it is that the Bible cannot be read with profit if it is looked upon as simply an anthology of poetry, story-telling, historical narrative, and other kinds of writing. The quality of the writing, what makes the poetry good poetry, the story-telling good story-telling, and so on, is what the poetry, the story-telling and the rest are about. In order to read the Bible with profit, we must pass beyond a stage of detachment. We can read the Bible with profit if we agree with what it says. We can read the Bible with profit if we disagree with what it says. What we cannot do is to read the Bible with profit while remaining indifferent to it—while setting aside, while disregarding, its content. Yet, if I do not greatly misjudge the volume called *The Bible as Literature*, that is what in that volume it is supposed we can do.

I feel that, while of vital importance, the point is not an easy one to make. Let me put it this way. Imagine a writer who is not a churchgoer. He may call himself an agnostic, or he may not trouble to call himself anything. The writer takes some religious legend and turns it into a story. This has actually happened. The French nineteenth-century novelist Gustave Flaubert made out of a religious legend the story called *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*. Now had Flaubert, in view of his beliefs or lack of beliefs, left out anything of the religious character of the legend he would have been bound to spoil his story. Once we see that this must be so, we shall also see that the only

way to take "the Bible as literature" is to forget that it is literature. Flaubert did not fail to see it. Read *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, either in the original or in translation, and you will see that, although the author was no religious believer, everything miraculous in the story is described as if it must have happened miraculously. Flaubert also wrote a full-length novel which he made up out of another religious legend, the legend of the temptation of St. Anthony. And there again the narrative reads as if everything narrated must have happened as the legend implies. It is this appearance of conviction that makes both the story and the novel readable. Note that they could also be made readable by an air of all-pervading scepticism ; but that scepticism is never so moving as conviction. Had Flaubert attempted to write from the standpoint of indifference, while disregarding, while setting aside, the miraculous, then certainly he would have failed as a story-teller. Indeed, it is unlikely he would have been able to complete either his story or his novel. For it is of course enthusiasm for his subject that makes the story-teller want to tell a story ; enthusiasm is indispensable, not only in order that he should tell his story well, but in order that he should be able to tell it at all. Enthusiasm for the subject is what gives the language in which a story is told its purpose.

So that all I have been doing while I have been speaking of the Bible is to have brought out the implications of the statement : "There is a prose for every occasion." How close indeed is the association of matter with manner in what is called style we may see from my reading to you a short passage out of the Book of Common Prayer. The greater part of our Book of Common Prayer we owe to Thomas Cranmer, who became Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and later perished at the stake. The Book of Common Prayer appeared in its first form more than half a century before the publication of the Authorized Version.

Here, then, is the passage :

When they come to the Grave, while the Corpse is made ready to be laid in the earth, the Priest shall say, or the Priest and the Clerks shall sing:

Man that is born of Woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?

Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, to fall from thee.

These words are, of course, from the Order for the Burial of the Dead. In order to understand that prose is enabled to be good prose through the purpose for which it is written, we need only ask ourselves if the words here would possess their earnest and severe beauty had they been composed, so to speak, in a void. They owe their beauty and their poignancy to being concerned with the dreadful fact of death and the inscrutable mystery of the grave. The high quality of the style is bestowed upon them through the purpose for which they were set down; it is that purpose which has inspired their eloquence. We cannot really appreciate them in detachment from the hope and entreaty which they express. I am not saying that they are beautiful and poignant words only for those who would hold the Christian faith. What I wish to insist upon is how vital must be some consciousness of the finality of death for this world if they are truly to be apprehended in all their poignancy and beauty; some consciousness of the finality of death for this world and of the complex of feeling that has led all kinds and conditions of men to hope for a life beyond the grave and the redemption of their earthly lives. In short, we get our lasting profit from reading by holding to the feeling, the emotion, which the

reading excites in us, and pursuing its ramifications as far as ever we can. It is not enough, for instance, to tell ourselves, after reading some selected passage from the Bible, that it is very fine. We need to go further, and to ask ourselves what it really is that makes it fine—what is the secret of its style. So it is that the manner is inextricably bound up with the matter.

Then there is another thing to be noticed about style or good writing. The test of a style, the test of how good good writing is, is how often that piece of good writing will stand being re-read and re-read again. That is where, among other elements, sincerity comes in. And now, as we turn to examine sincerity in writing more closely, we see that it is not merely that the author has meant what he says, that he has been in earnest, but that it is also how far the character of the author is, as we say, genuine. Good writing is never very good if it is magniloquent or affected; and such writing we cannot read again and again with ever renewed pleasure. Many readers are content not to go back to anything they have read once. Often, they read a piece of writing that is magniloquent or affected, and on a first impression they think it very fine. If they were to return to it, they could not fail to grow aware of its inadequacy. But they never do return to it, and so they go on thinking it fine. By weight of numbers they come to exaggerate the quality of the writing of—shall we say Macaulay? The other day I read in a volume containing much pondered criticism that "an essay by Macaulay is eminently a thing of its own kind, with its own unrivalled excellencies." The date of this estimate is as recent as 1941. Can we agree with it? That both Macaulay's *Essays* and his *History of England* have many striking and attractive qualities is of course not to be denied. But have the *Essays* "unrivalled excellencies"? Is his prose really such that we grow fonder of it the more we read it? Those are questions which can best be answered by my reading to you an extract from one of the *Essays*:

Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The King cringed to his rival that he might trample on his people, sank into a viceroy of France, and pocketed, with complacent infamy, her degrading insults, and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the policy of the state. The government had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the Anathema Maranatha of every fawning dean. In every high place, worship was paid to Charles and James, Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race accursed of God and man was a second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nations.

This is from the article entitled "Milton," with which, upon its original publication in a review in the year 1825, Macaulay, then aged only twenty-five, sprang at one leap into fame. Of this particular article the commentator of 1941, whom I quoted just now on the subject of the *Essays* in general, says: "It announced definitely the arrival of a new critic with a note of authority, a style of great distinction, and an extraordinary power of capturing and holding the attention of readers." *It will be worth* our while, I think, to see *how far this praise—uttered* 116 years after the first *appearance of the* article to which it applies—can *be found justifiable*. That the prose writings of Macaulay, both during his lifetime and thereafter down to the present day, have had the "power of capturing and holding the attention of readers" is merely the statement of a plain truth. But "a style of great distinction"? It should be obvious to the most careless eye that the colours used in the word-painting I have read to you are coarse and crude. There is not a reference which is not general, and every epithet is a superlative. And not only superlative, but also commonplace. Insults are "degrading," harlots "caress," buffoons "jest," the

courtier always "grins." We are told that the Stuarts were accursed of God. How could Macaulay possibly know? For that matter, it is hyperbole to say, as he says, that they were cursed by mankind, nor has any whole nation—not even our own—made of them, as he alleges, a by-word. It may be said: But "Milton" is Macaulay's first article, and to fasten upon that as an example of Macaulay's prose is perhaps unfair. Yet there is no question that certain characteristics of style, which were first exhibited in this article, reappear in many a subsequent piece of his prose. Over-emphatic epithets Macaulay, it seems, was never able to resist. "Abject misery and dissolute manners had furnished inexhaustible matter to the satirical genius of Pope." The sentence is a fair sample of the language of the *Essays* in general. Both "abject" and "dissolute" are needlessly emphatic. And why call Pope's matter "inexhaustible"? What evidence is there that it could not have been exhausted? "Tore his dinner like a famished wolf." That again is unmistakable Macaulay. Nowadays we say "wolfed his dinner," which, indisputably, is more terse. If one says "wolf" there is surely no need to say "famished" also. That is pleonasm. "Regard his character with mingled contempt and admiration, with mingled aversion and gratitude"—that is forcible-feeble. It is tumid. And who was Macaulay to permit himself to express contempt for a giant of the calibre of Bacon? We indicate to ourselves the crudity of such writing by saying that the writer was capable of only coarse feeling. The impulse which made Macaulay entitle his essay on Bacon "Lord Bacon," although Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, the Earl of St. Albans was never Lord Bacon, is the impulse that seems to have constantly guided his pen. The one word "Bacon" was not enough for him. He had to inflate. The fact is, he had no eye, no feeling, for particularity, for shades, for qualification. He could see, he could feel, only extremes. He brings everything under the crude glare of the spotlight: everything is either pure white or pure black.

He complains of Dr. Johnson's " antithetical forms of expression." His own antitheses are more objectionable. He complains of Johnson's sentences padded with " useless epithets." His own pages are strewn with symptoms of the same incontinence. And there they are noxious in a way Johnson's are not. For Johnson's prose preserves its balance. Extremes in Johnson's prose are shunned. But Macaulay's pen could not shun them. His matter made that impossible. Once again we find the inseparability of matter and manner being verified. It is because what Macaulay had to say was always unrefined, general, and not visualized, that his language is as it is. All writing is conditioned by its subject-matter. That is the real meaning of the statement that style is the man himself.

It is why Matthew Arnold pronounced judgement on Macaulay's writings in terms of the man, and why the judgement is in striking contrast to the praise of Macaulay's style uttered in 1941, and which I quoted to you earlier. Writing in 1889 Arnold said :

" Let us consider a critic whose reputation still stands firm " —the commentator of 1941 whom I have already quoted implies that the reputation still stands firm to-day, fifty-four years later, and indeed Arnold goes on : " will stand, many people think, for ever—the great apostle of the Philistines, Lord Macaulay." Arnold, you will recollect, meant by " the Philistines " the great mass of the English people who, at any rate since the Industrial Revolution, have been impervious to the existence of all art and culture. " Lord Macaulay " (Arnold goes on) " was . . . a born rhetorician, a splendid rhetorician doubtless, and, beyond that, an *English* rhetorician also, an honest rhetorician ; still, beyond the apparent rhetorical truth of things he never could penetrate ; for their vital truth, for what the French call the *vraie vérité*, he had absolutely no organ ; therefore, his reputation, brilliant as it is, is not secure. Rhetoric so good as his excites and gives pleasure ; but by pleasure alone you cannot permanently bind men's spirits to you. . . . For a spirit of any delicacy and dignity, what a fate, if he could foresee it ! to be an oracle for one generation, and then of little or no account for ever."

One statement in this passage defines exactly the superficiality, and therefore the fundamental falsity, of almost every affirmation of Macaulay's : " Beyond the apparent

rhetorical truth of things he never could penetrate." And the further statement that "by pleasure alone you cannot permanently bind men's spirits to you"—that, too, is something we should be glad to be reminded of. It turns up opportunely to reinforce the standpoint from which the whole of the present lectures are being delivered. Certainly we need to find pleasure in reading. But pleasure alone is not enough. For mere pleasure is only of the moment. If we are to read for profit, if profit is to accrue to us from our reading, our reading must stir our emotions. We must be conscious of being given glimpses of the vital truth, of the *vraie vérité*. For the profit lies in what our reading leaves permanently impressed upon us. Finally, in this passage from Matthew Arnold, let us notice the phrase, "a spirit of any delicacy and dignity." Delicacy —that is what is entirely absent from the prose of Macaulay.

Francis Bacon, the man for whose character Macaulay declared he felt "mingled contempt and admiration, mingled aversion and gratitude," is another writer with a great reputation. His *Essays* and the prose portions of Shakespeare's plays are together the only prose writings produced before the reign of Charles I that are now widely read. Yet the style, the language, of the *Essays* is not a style we can wholeheartedly admire. Of course it is good, or it would not have been so much read and so much admired. But there is a limit to the extent a man may write well by merely polishing the expression of commonplaces. And that is all Bacon, in the *Essays*, has really done. The thought is commonplace, the expression elegant but stilted. Let me read to you the first half of one of the most widely known of the *Essays*:

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. The chief use for delight, is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgement and disposition of business; for expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs come best from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies, is

sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgement wholly by their rule, is the humour of a scholar: they perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments and the meaner sort of books; else distilled books are, like common distilled waters, flashy things. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man, and writing an exact man; and, therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory: if he confer little, he had need have a present wit: and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not.

If you have listened to this passage conscious only of what it says, and are not swayed by the reputation of a great name, you will no doubt agree that it is all very artificial. Who wants to know that some books are to be tasted? To my mind, the passage sounds as if Bacon had jotted down from time to time any commonplace on the subject which he happened to come across or to think of, and then, when there were enough commonplaces, had joined them together like the pieces of some jig-saw puzzle into an elaborate pattern. Compare the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (who was born only twenty-seven years after Bacon), treating of a theme not so very different:

By Manners, I mean not here, decency of behaviour; as how one should salute another, or how a man should wash his mouth, or pick his teeth before company, and such other points of the *Small Morals*; but those qualities of mankind, that concern their living together in Peace, and Unity. To which end we are to consider, that the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such

Finis ultimus, utmost aim, nor *Summum Bonum*, greatest Good, as is spoken of in the Books of the old Moral Philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose Desires are at an end, than he, whose Senses and Imagination are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter. The cause whereof is, that the object of a man's desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life; and differ only in the way: which ariseth partly from the diversity of passions, in divers men; and partly from the difference of the knowledge, or opinion each one has of the causes, which produce the effect desired.

So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. And from hence it is, that Kings, whose power is greatest, tend their endeavours to the assuring it at home by Laws, or abroad by Wars: and when that is done, there succeedeth a new desire; in some, of Fame from new Conquest; in others, of ease and sensual pleasure; in others, of admiration, or being flattered for excellence in some art, or other ability of the mind.

Competition of Riches, Honour, Command, or other power, *inclineth to Convention*, Enmity, and War: because the way of one Competitor, to the attaining of his desire, is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other. Particularly, competition of praise, inclineth to a reverence of Antiquity. For men contend with the living, not with the dead; to these ascribing more than due, that they may obscure the glory of the other.

This short extract from the *Leviathan* of Hobbes shows him, not to have busied himself fitting neatly together little lumps of already completed and hence congealed thought, but to have been striving to set forth his very own personal thought—what he was himself thinking for himself. The passage I have just read is the prose of a man striving to say something whereas the passage from Bacon is the prose of a man concerned only to give elegance

to something the saying of which presents no difficulty whatever. For this reason, if Bacon's is good, the writing of Hobbes is better writing.

The best writing, the best prose, at the same time as it is appropriate to its occasion and at the same time as it fulfils its purpose, is the writing, the prose, that approximates most to the concrete and the visual. Some subjects are inescapably abstract, abstruse, and complex, as we saw last week when considering deep books and difficult reading. Such subjects must be treated in abstract language. Even then, however, there is no reason why the imagery resorted to in expounding them should not be always concrete; and if it is, the writing will be the better writing on that account. Concrete imagery has sometimes made the fortune of a sentence. Listen to this:

> The sensuous curtain is a deception and a cheat, if it hides some colourless movement of atoms, some spectral woof of impalpable abstractions, or unearthly ballet of bloodless categories.

That is an admirable sentence. Its author is the English philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846–1924). On reading or hearing it, we are tempted to say, if this is philosophy, then let us read philosophy. And if the sentence moves us to say to ourselves something like that, it is thanks to its concrete images—"movement," "*woof*," "*ballet*." In particular, the unforgettable phrase, "*an unearthly* ballet of bloodless categories," *is often quoted* or *misquoted*.

Writing that is, so to speak, concrete—that is to say, particular, writing that makes the reader visualize whatever is being described, that obviously is the writing for narrative. Macaulay unquestionably had a gift for narrative, and, as we have seen, his writing still claims its admirers. But if we allow that Macaulay's writing is good, then the following must be rated as very much better.

> I then came back to my House, and gave Order (for which I had a Warrant) for a great Quantity of the strongest Cable and Bars of Iron. The Cable was about as thick as Packthread, and the Bars of the length and size of a Knitting Needle. I trebled

the Cable to make it stronger, and for the same Reason I twisted three of the Iron Bars together, bending the extremities into a Hook. Having thus fixed fifty Hooks to as many Cables, I went back to the North-East Coast, and, putting off my Coat, Shoes, and Stockings, walked into the Sea, in my leathern Jerkin, about half an hour before High Water. I waded with what haste I could, and swam in the middle about thirty yards, till I felt ground. I arrived at the Fleet in less than half an hour. The Enemy was so frighted when they saw me, that they leaped out of their Ships, and swam to shore, where there could not be fewer than thirty thousand Souls: I then took my Tackling, and, fastening a Hook to the Hole at the Prow of each, I tied all the Cords together at the end. While I was thus employed, the Enemy discharged several thousand Arrows, many of which stuck in my Hands and Face: and, besides the excessive smart, gave me much Disturbance in my Work. My greatest Apprehension was for mine Eyes, which I should have infallibly lost, if I had not suddenly thought of an Expedient. I kept, among other little Necessaries, a pair of Spectacles in a private Pocket, which, as I observ'd before, had escap'd the Emperor's Searchers. These I took out, and fastened as strongly as I could upon my Nose, and thus armed, went on boldly with my Work, in spite of the Enemy's Arrows; many of which struck against the Glasses of my Spectacles, but without any other effect further than a little to discompose them. I had now fastened all the Hooks, and taking the Knot in my Hand, began to pull; but not a Ship would stir, for they were all too fast held by their Anchors, so that the boldest part of my Enterprise remained. I therefore let go the Cord, and, leaving the Hooks fixed to the Ships, I resolutely cut with my Knife the Cables that fastened the Anchors, receiving about two hundred Shots in my Face and Hands; then I took up the knotted End of the Cables, to which my Hooks were tied, and with great Ease drew fifty of the Enemy's largest Men-of-War after me.

The Blefuscudians, who had not the least Imagination of what I intended, were . . . confounded with Astonishment.

I expect most of you will have recognized the source of this passage. It is from Mr. Lemuel Gulliver's account of his stay in the Island of Lilliput, and describes his ingenious capture of the fleet of the king of the adjoining Island of Blefuscu. I dwelt a little on *Gulliver's Travels* last week. I need no excuse for returning to it this.

We saw a couple of weeks ago that the value of biography, of diaries, and of similar kinds of writing, lies, above all,

in the veracity of detail. It is thanks to this veracious detail, more than to any other one element, that there is profit to be had from reading writings of those kinds. This evening we have just had an example of the value of detail, fictitious detail, in narrative, in story-telling. In *Gulliver's Travels* the detail—as we have just seen from the extract I read—is extraordinarily vivid and minute. For the success of a piece of fiction that is most important. For that of *Gulliver's Travels* it is especially important. In all fiction vividness and minuteness of detail contribute greatly to the pleasure of our reading, and to the strength of our subsequent recollection of what we have read. In *Gulliver's Travels* the vividness and minuteness of detail further make the countries visited instantly interesting. They are fanciful, and yet so vividly portrayed that we imagine them to be real. Another feature which makes Gulliver's adventures in both Lilliput and Brobdingnag seem to have actually happened is the unflagging care with which the reader is made to bear in mind the scale of everything in and around both islands, and this care to keep the scale of things before the reader is a care for detail. The reader can see the adventures happening. He is made to visualize them. That is what endears a suitably bowdlerized Gulliver to the nursery. It is what ranks the narrative prose of Swift among the very best prose.

It is a prose astonishingly simple and clear. In contrast to the prose of Macaulay, it aims at no rhetorical effects. Its vocabulary is restricted, a vocabulary drawn from the everyday language of the time in which it was being written. Yet in the hands of a master, to what admirable narrative does it give rise! If there are no "glowing words or pointed sentences" in Swift's narrative prose, this prose is nevertheless "always equable, always easy." To build up out of simple words sentences that shall be urbane and polished is itself great art. To make the sentences, in addition, invariably clear is very great art. It might be supposed that a prose so simple was unfitted

to express and to excite feeling. There could be no greater mistake. As one critic has recently remarked, unrelieved simplicity in prose tends to produce monotony. But the prose of Swift does not produce monotony, because it is always alive with feeling. It has none of the marmoreal chill of the prose of Bacon's *Essays*. For anyone wishing to write clean, straightforward English, our literature offers no model superior to Swift. Hardly any other great English writer has combined such simplicity with such perfection of utterance.

If I speak so highly of Swift, I nevertheless do not want to give you the notion that simple prose is the only prose we can admire. Prose, in order to be good, should, as we have seen, be appropriate to its occasion, and thus should fulfil its purpose. There are many occasions for which simple prose is not appropriate, many purposes which cannot be fulfilled by means of simple prose. He who would read for profit will not restrict his admiration to prose of any one kind. The ability he will seek to acquire and to develop is the ability to distinguish between high-sounding but essentially shallow prose like Macaulay's, like that of Bacon's *Essays*, and firm and substantial prose like that of the Authorized Version, of Hobbes, of Swift, of Lord Wavell, of the author of the "Instructions for the Boatswain." To that end he will study the styles of the great writers of English, not only the translators of the Bible, not only Hobbes and Swift, but also Thomas More, Harpsfield, Clarendon, Bunyan, Cobbett, Newman, Sir James Frazer, and whatever others happen to appeal to him. And in studying these styles he will bear in mind that there is no such thing as literature *per se*, as literature *in vacuo*, and that the quality of the manner can only be fully gauged by reference to the matter.

There is of course much more about good and better writing that could be said with advantage. But perhaps I have succeeded in at least indicating where the heart of the matter lies. In conclusion this evening I should like to make a remark or two about literary criticism.

This seems to be the most convenient point at which to do so. When we were considering the reading of novels for profit, I suggested that once we have read a novel and been impressed by it—I mean a novel whose author is dead, a classic, or a possible classic—we might do well to go on to read what critics have said about it and about the work of the author generally, for then we should be able to go back to the novel in question and read it a second time, re-read it, with an added understanding. The same practice may be recommended for books of other kinds. But the reading of criticism on its own, without reference to some one piece of literature or of apparent literature, is better deferred till we have read a number of recognized pieces of literature and have thought for ourselves about each of them. Engaged in early, the reading of criticism is likely to have one of two effects. It may lead to our taking over bodily the opinions of the critic we happen to pick up. It may even cause *us* to neglect undergoing ourselves the effects of the pieces of writing criticized. If the reading of criticism, when undertaken without the object of obtaining light on some work we have just come to know, leads to this, then obviously it has been engaged in mistakenly. Again, this reading of criticism, even if it sends us to the pieces of writing criticized, or to some of them, *is not necessarily* affecting us for our good. Till we are, as *it were, impervious* to the spell cast by an *eloquent pen, it is likely* that if we go to a piece of literature at the suggestion of an able critic we shall only see in this piece of literature what he has urged us to look out for. What he has left it to us to discover for ourselves we may miss. At the same time we want to recognize that criticism, especially that put forward by outstanding critics, can help us greatly in the formation of our judgement and taste, precisely because it does tell us what to look for. And that is why I now name a few works of criticism.

I suggest it is highly desirable that we should—at least, at first—confine ourselves in the reading of criticism to

such as is acknowledged to be the best. I have already referred to Matthew Arnold, who wrote during the last century and who is unquestionably one of our few important critics. Arnold, in criticizing literature, criticized also the English social community of his time. He showed that a nation's literary production at any particular period seemingly tends to reflect current beliefs and the current tone of society. Moreover, Arnold himself wrote prose with an undeniable charm, an attractive freshness, and a disarming air of candour. No doubt he is inclined to pontificate. And that may have been irritating to his contemporaries. We, however, are already so far away from him that we can afford to smile at it. Arnold's great virtue remains virtuous. It is that he is able to make us see how both good and better writing are always the reflection of what is being written about, and that whenever he says that a piece of prose is not good he is able to show us exactly why. For instance, in order to criticize Burke, in his opinion "our greatest prose writer," he quotes some passages. First this:

> Blindfold themselves, like bulls that shut their eyes when they push, they drive, by the point of their bayonets, their slaves, blindfolded, indeed, no worse than their lords, to take their fictions for currencies, and to swallow down paper pills by thirty-four millions sterling at a dose.

Then this:

> They used it [the royal name] as a sort of navel-string, to nourish their unnatural offspring from the bowels of royalty itself. Now that the monster can purvey for its own subsistence, it will only carry the mark about it, as a token of its having torn the womb it came from.

Then this:

> Without one natural pang he [Jean Jacques Rousseau] casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgustful amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings.

Having quoted these passages, Arnold goes on to remark:

> I say that is extravagant prose; prose too much suffered to indulge its caprices; prose at too great a distance from the

centre of good taste; prose, in short, with the note of provinciality. People may reply, it is rich and imaginative; yes, that is just it, it is *Asiatic* prose, as the ancient critics would have said; prose somewhat barbarously rich and over-loaded. But the true prose is Attic prose.

And thanks to the aptness of the quotations, we are able to see exactly what he means. The quotations make clear what his comment might leave uncertain. We have learned something, not only about the writing of Burke, but about the nature of good writing in general.

The first of Arnold's books to read is *Culture and Anarchy*. It is an indictment of the English treatment of culture. First published in 1869, it has not become out of date. I further recommend by Arnold two volumes entitled *Essays in Criticism* (1865, 1889). In these we may skip the eulogies of Maurice de Guérin and his sister, two French writers who have not retained the importance which Arnold ascribed to them. The other essays, however, will amply repay study. And they will not only help us to acquire that ability to recognize the symptoms of literature which is indispensable to our reading for profit; literature is what they are themselves.

Potentially, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was perhaps our greatest critic. But unfortunately his criticism is scattered and fragmentary and mixed up with much that is now of little help to the enjoyment of good books. For this reason I recommend the volume entitled *Coleridge* and published by the Nonesuch Press (Random House, in the United States). This is a splendid piece of editing by Mr. Stephen Potter, who has ransacked all the sources for whatever in the writings of Coleridge is still pertinent. He draws on the famous *Biographia Literaria*, on the *Lectures*, on the *Notebooks*, and on Coleridge's correspondence. The result is that this Nonesuch volume contains all the prose of Coleridge which the general reader can want—and most of the poetry as well.

The criticism of William Hazlitt (1773–1830) is not equal to the best of his contemporary Coleridge. But it

covers a wide field, it abounds in useful information, it should afford valuable guidance—especially to poetry. It is all in the form of lectures which Hazlitt originally delivered in London, having first carefully written them out. There are five volumes of these lectures, as follows: *Characters in Shakespeare's Plays* (two volumes, the first 1817, the second 1818); *Lectures on the English Poets* (again in two volumes, the first 1818, the second 1819); and *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819).

Finally, from among a number of other critical writings, I single out for your particular attention two essays by John Dryden (1631–1700), the writer who more than any other cast the mould for modern English prose. Dryden is not only one of our great prose writers, he is also a great poet, a leading dramatist, and last, but not least, an indefatigable translator. And on top of all that, he is a great critic. In criticism he concerned himself with poetry, and more particularly with poetic drama. The two essays I have in mind are *Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay* (1688) and *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatick Poesie*. The first, after an introduction, is thrown into the form of a conversation in which there are four interlocutors. They are Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius, and Neander. Each defends a point of view. The dialogue form may account for the fact that at the same time as the essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* carries the reader to the very centre of its subject, it is lively and delightful reading.

Mention of these two critical essays of Dryden's on the subject of poetic drama may be taken to prepare the way for poetic drama to be considered by us in some later lecture. I propose, however, to speak first of plays in prose. That I shall do next week.

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SIXTH LECTURE

PLAYS AS LITERATURE

A PLAY is usually a piece of writing intended for performance on a stage.

No doubt there are writings—although, relatively speaking, not many—cast apparently in the form of plays; that is to say, which are divided into acts, if not into scenes as well, and the matter of which is put into the mouths of an assortment of characters; and yet that are not suitable for stage performance. Such writings may be in prose, but more of them, perhaps, are in verse. Whether in prose or verse, they are not going to concern us. Let us take plays to be pieces of writing brought into existence primarily for performance on a stage; that is to say, pieces of writing out of which competent actors and actresses can make an entertainment which will excite and hold the attention of an audience and leave that audience satisfied—aesthetically satisfied, satisfied with the entertainment as dramatic art.

This being what plays are, it might seem that the essentials of a play are good dialogue, good situations, and a plot which is properly handled; and that whether or not a play happens to be literature must be of quite secondary importance. And it is certainly true that a great many plays which prove highly entertaining when performed and performed well, yield neither immediate pleasure nor lasting profit in the reading, and are in no sense literature. Nevertheless, the test of a good play is akin to the test of a good book. A good play is a play we can enjoy seeing performed more than once. And it turns out that the plays we have pleasure in seeing performed again and again are the plays that are not only successful on the stage, but are also readable. The plays we can never

tire of seeing are literature. When we look into the matter, we see this is not surprising.

In order that a play, in addition to being entertaining at a single performance in a theatre, should be worth reading as well, it has to meet two requirements. In the first place, however closely it mimics the conversation of its day, there ought to be substance and, so to speak, texture in its language. If it happens to be a play in verse, the verse ought to be poetry. In the second place, there ought to be some sense in which its plot, or its representation of persons, or of manners, is significant—has some appeal to our feelings whereby it is connected with real life. A play which meets both those requirements, assuming the playwright to know his business, will always be worth while seeing performed more than once. So it is that the plays most suitable for the stage are plays which are literature.

Such plays fall into various categories. These categories we may on this occasion ignore. You remember how in *Hamlet* Polonius distinguishes a wide diversity of plays. He speaks of " tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-comical, comical-historical, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral." There is no call to follow him in these divisions. It is enough if we look on plays that are readable, and that may therefore be literature, as being either comedies or tragedies, the category of comedy being stretched in one direction so as to include farce and in the other direction so as to include any serious piece which is neither tragedy in particular nor poetic drama in general.

All the great tragedies or so-called tragedies we possess in English have been written in verse. Hence I shall speak about tragedy at the same time as I deal with poetic drama. That will be in the next lecture. This evening my subject is comedy, the name " comedy " to be understood in the way I have just defined it.

What comedies shall we look at ?

In the course of the lecture on novels I said that any one wishing to make himself familiar with the symptoms of literature in novels, might well enter upon a course of reading novels that are recognized to be literature, by first reading—especially if he has not been in the habit of reading the work of dead novelists—some of the novels by authors who, while no longer alive, have not been dead very long—novels, that is, which are still near to us in time—and then gradually work backward from decade to decade. The suggestion was based on the psychological principle that the completely unfamiliar is best approached through the almost familiar. The good novels by authors who, though dead, are near to us in time portray social life and social conditions more or less as we have known them during our own lives. In spite of the social changes which have taken place since, say, 1890, the social scene in that year is not so different from the scene to-day as to be in any way unintelligible to some one who has hitherto confined himself to reading only in the present. Moreover, the construction of a novel has not really changed very much in the interval either.

Now, in view of my having said this in my lecture on novels, it might seem that what holds for novels would hold also for comedies, and that if we have not been in the habit of reading plays our best course is to begin by reading some by authors who, though dead, are near to us in time. And very possibly this might hold were it not for two important facts. The first of these facts is that the best comedies written either towards the end of the seventeenth or during the eighteenth century are not only delightful to read still to-day ; they are also still very easy to read. And the second fact is that in the matter of the appearance of good plays the greater part of the nineteenth century was a desert.

Here we shall save time by accepting the verdict of critics, and critics are agreed that during the nineteenth century there fell on the production of literature for the English stage a kind of blight. Between the writing of

The School for Scandal, a comedy first performed in 1777, and the writing in 1895 of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, there was not made public a single play worth the attention of a student of literature. I shall not try to explain how this happened, nor do I believe that how it happened can be adequately explained. The main thing is the fact. From the standpoint of literature, the English stage remained for nearly a hundred and twenty years a blank. But the years from 1777 backward all the way to the Restoration of 1660 form a brilliant era in the English theatre. So, if we want to try to grasp the essence of comedy, it is to that period we should go.

If we are going to seek the essence of English comedy, we should first notice that there are two principal kinds of comedy. Let us plunge *in medias res*. I will read to you a short scene from a comedy which had its first performance in the year 1700.

HE. Do you lock yourself up from me, to make my Search more curious? Or is this pretty Artifice contriv'd, to signify that here the Chace must end, and my Pursuit be crown'd, for you can fly no further?

SHE. Vanity! No—I'll fly and be follow'd to the last Moment, tho' I am upon the very Verge of Matrimony, I expect you should sollicit me as much as if I were wavering at the Grate of a Monastery, with one Foot over the Threshold. I'll be sollicited to the very last, nay, and afterwards.

HE. What, after the last?

SHE. O, I should think I was poor and had Nothing to bestow, if I were reduc'd to an inglorious Ease; and freed from the agreeable Fatigues of Solicitation.

HE. But do not you know, that when Favours are conferr'd upon instant and tedious Sollicitation, that they diminish in their Value, and that both the Giver loses the Grace, and the Receiver lessens his Pleasure?

SHE. It may be in Things of common Application; but never sure in Love. O, I hate a Lover, that can dare to think he draws a Moment's Air, independent on the Bounty of his Mistress. There is not so impudent a Thing in Nature, as the saucy Look of an assured Man, confident of Success. The Pedantic Arrogance of a very Husband, has not so pragmatical an Air. Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my Will and Pleasure.

HE. Would you have 'em both before Marriage? Or will you be contented with the first now, and stay for the other till after Grace?

SHE. Ah don't be impertinent—My dear Liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful Solitude, my darling Contemplation, must I bid you then adieu? Ay-h adieu—My Morning Thoughts, agreeable Wakings, indolent Slumbers, ye *douceurs*, ye *Someils du Matin*, adieu—I can't do't, 'tis more than impossible. Positively, I'll lie-abed in a Morning as long as I please.

HE. Then I'll get up in a Morning as early as I please.

SHE. Ah! Idle Creature, get up when you will—And d'ye hear, I won't be called Names after I'm marry'd; positively I won't be call'd Names.

HE. Names!

SHE. Ay, as Wife, Spouse, my Dear, Joy, Jewel, Love, Sweet-heart, and the rest of that nauseous Cant, in which Men and their Wives are so fulsomly familiar,—I shall never bear *that*———Don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before Folks, like my Lady *Fadler* and Sir *Francis*: Nor go to *Hide-Park* together the first *Sunday* in a new Chariot, to provoke Eyes and Whispers: And then never be seen there together again; as if we were proud of one another the first Week, and asham'd of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a Play together, but let us be very strange and well bred: Let us be as strange as if we had been marry'd a great while; and as well bred as if we were not marry'd at all.

HE. Have you any more Conditions to offer? Hitherto your Demands are pretty reasonable.

SHE. Trifles,—As Liberty to pay and receive Visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive Letters, without Interrogatories or wry Faces on your Part; to wear what I please; and choose Conversation with Regard only to my own Taste; to have no Obligation upon me to converse with Wits that I don't like, because they are your Acquaintance; or to be intimate with Fools, because they may be your Relations. Come to Dinner when I please, dine in my Dressing-Room when I'm out of Humor, without giving a Reason. To have my Closet inviolate; to be sole Empress of my Tea-Table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking Leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the Door before you come in. These Articles subscrib'd, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by Degrees dwindle into a Wife.

HE. Your Bill of Fare is Something advanc'd in this latter Account. Well, have I Liberty to offer Conditions—That when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond Measure enlarg'd into a Husband.

SHE. You have free Leave, propose your utmost, speak and spare not.

HE. I thank you. *Imprimis* then, I covenant that your Acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn Confident, or Intimate of your own Sex; no she Friend to screen her Affairs under your Countenance, and tempt you to make Trial of a mutual Secrecy. No Decoy-Duck to wheedle you a *Fop-scrambling* to the Play in a Mask—Then bring you home in a pretended Fright, when you think you shall be found out—And rail at me for missing the Play, and disappointing the Frolic which you had to pick me up and prove my Constancy.

SHE. Detestable *Imprimis*! I go to the Play in a Mask!

HE. *Item*, I Article, that you continue to like your own Face, as long as I shall: And while it passes current with me, that you endeavour not to new coin it. To which End, together with all Vizards for the Day, I prohibit all Masks for the Night, made of Oil'd-skins and I know not what—Hogs Bones, Hares Gall, Pig Water, and the Marrow of a roasted Cat. In short, I forbid all Commerce with the Gentlewoman in *what-d'ye-call-it* Court. *Item*, I shut my Doors against all Bawds with Baskets, and Peny-worths of *Muslin, China, Fans, Atlasses*, &c.—*Item*, when you shall be Breeding——

SHE. Ah! Name it not.

HE. Which may be presum'd, with a Blessing on our Endeavours!

SHE. Odious Endeavours!

HE. I denounce against all straight lacing, squeezing for a Shape, 'till you mould my Boy's Head like a Sugar-loaf; and instead of a Man-Child, make me Father to a Crooked-billet. Lastly, to the Dominion of the *Tea-Table* I submit.—But with *Proviso*, that you exceed not in your Province; but restrain yourself to native and simple *Tea-Table* Drinks, as *Tea, Chocolate*, and *Coffee*. As likewise to genuine and authoriz'd *Tea-Table* Talk—Such as mending of Fashions, spoiling Reputations, railing at absent Friends, and so forth—But that on no Account you encroach upon the Mens Prerogative, and presume to drink Healths, or toast Fellows; for Prevention of which, I banish all *Foreign Forces*, all Auxiliaries to the *Tea-Table*, as *Orange-Brandy*, all *Anniseed, Cinamon, Citron* and *Barbadoes-Waters*, together with *Ratafia*—and the most noble Spirit of

Clary.—But for *Cowslip-Wine, Poppy-Water,* and all *Dormitives* those I allow.—These *Provisos* admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying Husband.

SHE. O horrid *Provisos* ! filthy strong Waters ! I toast Fellows, odious Men ! I hate your odious *Provisos.*

HE. Then we're agreed. Shall I kiss your Hand upon the Contract ?

That is a scene from one comedy. Let me now go on at once to read to you a passage from another comedy. You remember I said the first had its performance in 1700. This other is later. Its date is 1773.

MARLOW. Whither so fast, child ? A word with you.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Let it be short, then. I'm in a hurry. *(Aside.)* I believe he begins to find out his mistake. But it's too soon quite to undeceive him.

MARLOW. Pray, child, answer me one question. What are you, and what may your business in this house be ?

MISS HARDCASTLE. A relation of the family, Sir.

MARLOW. What ! a poor relation ?

MISS HARDCASTLE. Yes, Sir ; a poor relation, appointed to keep the keys, and to see that the guests want nothing in my power to give them.

MARLOW. That is, you act as the barmaid of this inn.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Inn ! O law—what brought that in your head ? One of the best families in the country keep an inn—Ha ! ha ! ha ! old Mr. Hardcastle's house an inn !

MARLOW. Mr. Hardcastle's house ! Is this Mr. Hardcastle's house, child ?

MISS HARDCASTLE. Ay, sure ! Whose else should it be ?

MARLOW. So then, all's out, and I have been damnably imposed on. O, confound my stupid head, I shall be laughed at over the whole town. I shall be stuck up in caricatura in all the print-shops. The *Dullissimo-Maccaroni.* To mistake this house of all others for an inn, and my father's old friend for an innkeeper ! What a swaggering puppy must he take me for ! What a silly puppy do I find myself ! There, again, may I be hang'd, my dear, but I mistook you for the barmaid.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Dear me ! dear me ! I'm sure there's nothing in my *behaviour* to put me on a level with one of that stamp.

MARLOW. Nothing, my dear, nothing. But I was in for a list of blunders, and could not help making you a subscriber. My stupidity saw everything the wrong way. I mistook your assiduity for assurance, and your simplicity for allurement. But it's over—This house I no more show *my* face in.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I hope, Sir, I have done nothing to disoblige you. I'm sure I should be sorry to affront any gentleman who has been so polite, and said so many civil things to me. I'm sure I should be sorry (*pretending to cry*) if he left the family upon my account. I'm sure I should be sorry people said anything amiss, since I have no fortune but my character.

MARLOW. (*Aside.*) By Heaven! she weeps. This is the first mark of tenderness I ever had from a modest woman, and it touches me. (*To her.*) Excuse me, my lovely girl; you are the only part of the family I leave with reluctance. But to be plain with you, the difference of our birth, fortune, and education, makes an honourable connexion impossible; and I can never harbour a thought of seducing simplicity that trusted in my honour, of bringing ruin upon one, whose only fault was being too lovely.

MISS HARDCASTLE. (*Aside.*) Generous man! I now begin to admire him.—(*To him.*) But I am sure my family is as good as Miss Hardcastle's; and though I'm poor, that's no great misfortune to a contented mind; and until this moment, I never thought that it was bad to want fortune.

MARLOW. And why now, my pretty simplicity?

MISS HARDCASTLE. Because it puts me at a distance from one, that, if I had a thousand pound, I would give it all to.

MARLOW. (*Aside.*) This simplicity bewitches me, so that if I stay, I'm undone. I must make one bold effort, and leave her.—(*To her.*) Your partiality in my favour, my dear, touches me most sensibly: and were I to live for myself alone, I could easily fix my choice. But I owe too much to the opinion of the world, too much to the authority of a father; so that—I can scarcely speak it—it affects me. Farewell.

Both of the extracts I have now read to you are from famous plays. Very likely, indeed, most of you will have identified them. The first extract is taken from *The Way of the World*, most famous of the plays of William Congreve. It is the often-quoted duologue between the hero and the heroine—Mirabell and Millamant—in the scene where they agree to marry. The second extract is from *She Stoops*

to Conquer. The author of this second comedy is Oliver Goldsmith, of whom you may remember Dr. Johnson said that he touched nothing that he did not adorn.

The scene from *The Way of the World* has spoken for itself. It needs no elucidation. For the better understanding of the passage from *She Stoops to Conquer*, which you have listened to torn from a context that is necessary for its intelligibility, I may remind you of the circumstances which, in the play, lead up to this particular piece of dialogue. The father of a young man about town named Marlow wishes him to woo and marry the daughter of a Mr. Hardcastle, a country gentleman. An obedient son, Marlow sets out from London for Mr. Hardcastle's house, taking with him his friend Hastings. But Marlow doubts that his mission will be successful. He fancies that Miss Hardcastle will not be at all his kind of girl, and that when brought face to face with her he will be too shy to speak. However, he and Hastings set out. And they have almost reached their destination when night overtakes them. In the dark, they lose their way.

They seek guidance at a village alehouse. There they come upon Mr. Hardcastle's step-son, Tony Lumpkin. Tony is a rustic youth with an individual sense of humour. Marlow and Hastings inquire their way of him. He puts them on the right road all right, but at the same time he perpetrates a practical joke. He assures them that they have no hope of reaching Mr. Hardcastle's house that night, but that if they follow his directions they will come to an inn. The place he calls an inn is really the house they are looking for. They get there, and, as in the dark they have small chance of seeing what the building actually looks like, they are admitted under the illusion that, as Tony Lumpkin has told them, they are entering an inn. A curious circumstance encourages them in their mistake. Mr. Hardcastle, wishing his daughter to be thoroughly domesticated—in those days some fathers did have queer notions—has insisted that she shall keep house and that indoors she shall always wear a simple housekeeping

dress. When Miss Hardcastle appears to Marlow and Hastings in this costume, the household keys dangling from a chain at her girdle, they quite excusably take her for the barmaid of the inn in which they imagine themselves to be.

Miss Hardcastle is good looking, and Marlow, who was afraid he would be too shy to speak to a young lady, soon finds that, so long as he can mistake a young lady for a barmaid, he will flirt with her. At first he has been quite ready to take advantage of the supposed barmaid. Then, as he comes to be attracted to her in earnest, his better nature asserts itself. You have seen it doing so in the passage I have read to you. To this assertion of Marlow's better nature I will return in a moment.

In the meanwhile, let me make it clear why I have read these two extracts to you in juxtaposition, one after the other. The reason is that at the same time as *The Way of the World* and *She Stoops to Conquer* are both literature, each, it seems to me, is representative of one of the two main varieties of comedy.

In *The Way of the World* all else is overshadowed by the wit and sparkle of the dialogue, a wit and sparkle of unquestionably the first water. Auditor or reader of the play is so delighted with this wit and sparkle that he asks little more. And it is perhaps as well he does not. William Hazlitt—one of the critics whom, I said at the end of the lecture last week, it would repay us to read—declares that the play really has no characters. Lines are allotted to an actress who is to be addressed as Millamant and lines are also allotted to an actor who is to be addressed as Mirabell. And both may wear fine clothes, come on and go off the stage gracefully, and speak and behave vivaciously. But the play no more displays, he says, any woman corresponding to the name Millamant than it displays any man corresponding to the name Mirabell. Try, he goes on, try to imagine Millamant confronted by trouble or misfortune, and instantly she dissolves. Other critics have declared that *The Way of the World* has no

plot. It seems to me that both accusations go too far. There is plot of a sort. Fainall is married to the daughter of Lady Wishfort, but at the same time as he neglects his wife and carries on an affair with Mrs. Marwood, he covets the fortunes of both Lady Wishfort and Millamant. His schemes to secure these to himself are defeated only at the last moment by the threat of his exposure as Mrs. Marwood's lover. So too it cannot be said that the play contains no characters—that is to say, name-parts for whose situation our feelings may be stirred. The plight of Mrs. Fainall, brutally ill-used by her husband, has a certain pathos. We have only to use our imagination to be conscious of it. And of course, whether or not Millamant would at once dissolve into thin air in the face of adversity, as we actually find her, an heiress and in all the glory of youth and beauty, with suitors dangling round her whom she cannot resist playing off against one another, she is one of the most fascinating and delightful creatures of the stage. I remember the first time I saw *The Way of the World* performed—a good many years ago. I did not fail to fall under her spell. It was, I think, her words in the scene we went through this evening, "I may by degrees dwindle into a wife," that completed my subjugation. My experience that evening, I have since discovered, has been the common experience of playgoers whenever Millamant was to be seen on a stage—occasions unfortunately rare, for *The Way of the World* is not often revived. However, not to digress further, let it be admitted that if *The Way of the World* has a kind of plot, yet it is in no way a study of character. Let it be admitted that, as I have said, it is mostly wit and sparkle. But what sparkle, what transcendently fine wit! The scene we went through just now is only a sample. There is a country squire, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, who comes to town and calls on Lady Wishfort. The scene between the two is uproariously amusing. Equally good is the scene that follows Sir Wilfull's first appearance, a scene between him and two Londoners, his namesake and half-brother Witwoud, and

a certain Petulant. The London Witwoud, by the way, now passes as a man about town, but he began life as an attorney's clerk. Two more admirable parts are those of Waitwell, Mirabell's servant, and Foible, Lady Wishfort's woman. If *The Way of the World* is above all a piece of writing which is best appreciated in the performance, it is also one we can read and re-read. Of its kind, it is comedy of the first class. All this we need to recognize before we say that it does not display character, although it is true that character is not displayed in it.

How different is *She Stoops to Conquer*! No wit and sparkle here, and yet, as we have had an opportunity of seeing, the dialogue has a pervasive charm. And we not only have charming dialogue; we also have a real plot, and the presence of this plot results in a display of character. The plot may strike us as being both slight and simple. But that is precisely what stage plots need to be. Moreover, we could fall into no greater mistake than to suppose that, because the plot is simple, the character displayed is only a superficial one. Let us see what this character is.

We are shown Marlow, in the first place, fully prepared to find that a certain girl of his own station is insipid and forbidding. Does that cause him to hesitate to set out to go and woo her? At this stage, not at all. It never occurs to him that there may be any objection on her side. The only obstacle he foresees is his own shyness, the shyness which is apt to seize him in the presence of girls of his own class. So much in the first place. But in the course of the play Marlow reveals himself to have more in him than this. We are shown him, in the second place, thrown into the company of one whom he supposes to be no more than a pretty barmaid. Barmaids do not make him feel shy; on the contrary, with barmaids he is readily enterprising. And, overlooking the fact that the bestowing of her favours by a barmaid is, in strict fact, as much to her as the granting of the same favours can be to a young lady, he has assumed that from this barmaid in particular

he has only to ask in order to receive. That is in the second place. However, it is in the third place that Marlow's character grows really interesting.

For, in the third place, we are shown him discovering that the supposed barmaid is, according to her own assurances, a poor relation of Miss Hardcastle's. Every woman whom a man tries to seduce is somebody's daughter or somebody's sister, and if a man is reminded of this while attempting a seduction it may pull him up short. The supposed barmaid does not claim to be anybody's daughter or sister; only a poor relation. Yet the claim is enough to give Marlow pause. No doubt, both logically and morally, if there is any harm in trifling with the supposed barmaid's affections when she appears to be a poor relation, the harm would be as great although she were unrelated to any Hardcastle. But we have to remember that in the days of *She Stoops to Conquer*, some barmaids at least were understood to fall into a man's arms as some barmaids are understood to fall to-day—that is to say, rather easily. The only change since Goldsmith's time is that now—thanks perhaps very largely to progress in medicine, and, if needs be, in surgery also—some young ladies such as Miss Hardcastle was seem to fall easily too. But we must not wander from the point.

This is that at the stage we have reached Marlow recoils from making a plaything of the supposed barmaid. He may recoil partly, in accordance with a scruple very natural not only in the eighteenth century, but in any age, because he does not want to get into any bother over a relative of the young woman his father has wished him to marry; but he evidently recoils also because, by now, the supposed barmaid has captivated him in earnest. He is now ready to marry her, in spite of what his father would assuredly say. The readiness does him credit, and it does more. It is evident that *She Stoops to Conquer* is no piece of stark realism. It accepts the convention that true love is everything, even true love for a supposed barmaid, whose only recommendation for marriage to a young man about town

is, apart from her looks, that she is a poor relation. Of course the convention did not, in Goldsmith's time, stretch so far as to allow of Marlow's marrying an actual barmaid. The situation is saved by the fact that the girl is not a barmaid at all, but the very Miss Hardcastle his father has sent him along to woo. But within its convention *She Stoops to Conquer* does more than display Marlow having scruples about seducing a supposed barmaid. In the first place, as we have seen, he has no such scruples whatever. It is only in the third place that he acquires them. And whether he acquires them at the bidding of prudence or at the bidding of romantic love, the play unquestionably shows him undergoing development.

And that should make clear how *She Stoops to Conquer* differs from *The Way of the World*, and how each is representative of one of the two main varieties of comedy. *The Way of the World* is a comedy of manners, *She Stoops to Conquer* is a comedy of character.

Comedies of manners and comedies of character are the two main varieties of comedy.

It is thanks to the exhibition of either manners or character that plays in prose which attain to the rank of being literature may be read for profit. That is where their significance lies.

Needless to say, the depth or range of character displayed in comedies varies greatly. Let us briefly consider *The Country Wife*, a play written by William Wycherley in 1675; we shall thereby be brought to see what is the essential nature of comedy. In *The Country Wife* we have a Mr. Pinchwife who is afflicted with a peculiar fear. He is afraid of being made a cuckold. He is a middle-aged man, and by now the fear has become an obsession. For years it has prevented him from marrying. He has taken the great step at last, however, just before the action of the play begins. If he has been so bold, it is because he has been able at the same time to take what he imagines to be wise precautions. In the first place, the girl whom he has made his wife is country-bred, a complete stranger

to the temptations of the town. In the second place, he has arranged to keep her secluded in the country. Alas for these precautions! No sooner is he married than he has to come to London for his sister's wedding. It is not a ceremony to which he can very well fail to bring his new wife, and in any event he is too fearful to let her out of his sight. So the play opens with the couple in London lodgings. Pinchwife has been compelled to bring to London the wife he meant always to keep secluded in the country, but he still hopes he can escape the fate he goes in such mortal fear of. At first he proposes that, except on the occasion of the wedding, his wife shall remain indoors. But of course this is not at all Margery's idea. She has come to London for the first time, and she means to see London. We all know that to try to ignore a woman's wishes never availed any husband, and Pinchwife is no exception. She has heard a great deal about theatres, so she *insists* on being taken at the very least to the play. Pinchwife can only yield. And now he has to devise other precautions. They will go to the play in the gallery, as in the gallery, so he imagines, Margery is unlikely to catch the eye of any of the men about town. Then also Margery will be dressed as a boy, and he will pass her off as his younger brother.

As is to be expected, this excess of precaution defeats itself. Pinchwife is most anxious Margery shall not form a longing to take part in the pleasures of the town. In order to ensure that she shall avoid them, he describes them to her. And of course his description fills her with the very longing he is anxious to prevent her from having. At the theatre, in spite of sitting in the gallery, they run into a young man of Pinchwife's acquaintance, a young man named Horner. Of course Horner at once recognizes the true sex of the alleged younger brother. He makes bold to kiss this so-called brother, and Pinchwife has to look on, powerless. He cannot object to his brother being kissed. If he says that the supposed brother is really his wife, he will disclose the existence of his fears, and, as the

saying is, put ideas into Horner's head, so he has to stand by, and watch his wife being kissed.

There is worse to come. When taking Margery back to their lodgings, he is much disturbed in mind. He is sure Horner now covets her. What shall he do? It is then he commits the greatest of his succession of blunders. He decides that his sister Alithea shall not marry her intended husband, but another. What other? Why of course Horner! That will surely drive all thought of Margery out of Horner's head. To ensure the match, Pinchwife decides to take Alithea to Horner's lodging, and—this is the great blunder—the figure in disguise whom he does take is actually Margery. How the mistake occurs you must see from the text or a performance of the play itself.

In short, in *The Country Wife* Pinchwife is shown repeatedly courting the evil he wishes to shun. And the evil overtakes him owing to the very steps he takes to avoid it. He would not take these steps if he were not over-anxious and over-jealous. The cause of his misfortune is his own character.

The Country Wife is, accordingly, an exhibition of the character of Pinchwife. And there are other characters exhibited as well. The man whom Alithea, Pinchwife's sister, is going to marry before Pinchwife changes his mind on the subject, is an empty-headed fop named Sparkish. Talking loudly from the pit during the performance of a play, he says with great self-satisfaction: "And the reason why we are so often louder than the players is, because we think we speak more wit." In the same vein, he protests at the suggestion that the King—Charles II—will not notice his absence if he fails to appear at the royal supper. "Thou art," his friend Harcourt says to him, "one of those fools that think their attendance at the King's meals as necessary as his physicians, when you are more trouble to him than his doctors or his dogs." Is Sparkish shaken? Far from it. "Pshaw!" he retorts. "I know my interest, sir." Here we have an exhibition of manners—

of the manners of the time—as well as an exhibition of character. A play is seldom a pure specimen of one variety of comedy or the other. In that respect *The Way of the World* is an exception.

We have not yet done with Sparkish. Being the man we have seen him to be, he allows Harcourt to lay siege to Alithea under his very nose. Alithea complains of Harcourt's attentions. Threatened with being detected, Harcourt boldly carries the war into the enemy's country. He makes Sparkish the butt of the many fresh protestations with which he tries to rush Alithea off her feet. On the poor fop, this irony is entirely lost—as Harcourt knows all the time it will be. In this scene there is again an exhibition of manners combined with an exhibition of characters.

So far I may have given you the impression that all the characters exhibited in *The Country Wife* are rather unpleasant. Nearly every one is, I admit. But one character more than makes up for the unpleasantness of others. Charming and irresistible, Margery, the country wife after whom the play is named, provides a delightful foil to the foolish and rather disagreeable men into whose company she is thrown. Of Margery some worthy things have been said by William Hazlitt. He hopes, he says, that she is a character who will last for ever. So long as self-will, curiosity, and ignorance are to be found united in a same person, she will remain as good and as intelligible in the description. He continues: Margery is depicted with simple force and home truth; she is direct and downright. She blurts out her meaning before she knows what she is saying, and she speaks her mind in deed sooner and more often than in word. As you see, Margery is very feminine—incalculable, irritating, adorable. The better we get to know this play of Wycherley's, the more wholeheartedly shall we endorse Hazlitt's opinion of her. She alone is enough to make *The Country Wife* a comedy of character.

Yet *The Country Wife* is more than that. As we have

seen, it is also to some extent a comedy of manners. Above all—and this is the reason why I have chosen it to talk about—it sets before us the essential nature of comedy. For comedy may be said to arise in the contrast between human intention and human performance. Pinchwife's intentions are to prevent himself from being the victim of an unfaithful wife. The actions he performs to this end are such as to render her unfaithfulness inevitable. That is the essence of comedy. Comedy invariably points to a discrepancy.

In *The Way of the World* one discrepancy is that between the artificiality of the polished speech in which the principal characters express themselves and the rude naturalness of the feelings which this speech cloaks. As Hazlitt puts it, the natural man and the natural woman peep out at us from the foliage of the smart clothes and elegant wit. We do not meet such witty dialogue in the plays of our own day. What a distance separates the dialogue of—shall we say Noel Coward? from the elegance and wit of the speech of comedy in the year 1700! The dialogue being written to-day, dialogue reflecting the colloquial speech of the people of the present day in approximately the same social class as the majority of the characters in *The Way of the World*—such dialogue is made up of slang, parrot-like repetitions of stale sporting metaphors, clipped sentences, half-sentences, preposterous hyperbole. How different! we are inclined to say. Yet the difference is all on the surface. The dialogue of, say, Noel Coward, faithfully as it may seem to reflect the manners now current, is really as artificial as the dialogue of Congreve. In order to become aware of its artificiality, we need only think of the natural feelings and desires which it conceals or half-conceals. There is as much of this concealment in the dialogue of Noel Coward as in that of Congreve. Other evidence of the immutable character of the stage play I shall point out later.

In the comedy of character also there is discrepancy. But it lies nearer the essence of comedy as I defined that

essence just now. In *She Stoops to Conquer* Marlow thinks he will not like Miss Hardcastle and that he will find himself shy in her presence. When he meets her, all his expectations are falsified. He is not shy and he falls in love with her. And this comes about, or at the very least its coming about is greatly facilitated, by his mistaking her for a barmaid. He is not only mistaken about himself; he is mistaken about another character. That is the discrepancy which the play exhibits. In *The Country Wife* the discrepancy is much greater. It is sharper. The anxiety to ward off an imaginary peril is contrasted with the consequences of the actions performed at the dictates of this anxiety.

The contrast is amusing, as the contrast drawn in *She Stoops to Conquer* is amusing, as in *The Way of the World* the contrast between Fainall mirrored in the eyes of Lady Wishfort and others and the real Fainall is, in a more sardonic vein, amusing also. We get our word "comic," meaning "funny" or "amusing," from the word "comedy." And yet comedy is seldom merely amusing. Usually it is, as I have just said, sardonically amusing. This is even more true of *The Country Wife* than of *The Way of the World*. It is true of *She Stoops to Conquer*, as we see if we reflect on the implications of its action. Comedy is amusing in the same way as it is amusing to hear that some house is on fire, so long as we do not discover that the house is our own. For the laughter which comedy excites in us is always, if the comedy is pure comedy, laughter against ourselves. It may be good to laugh at ourselves, but if we realize fully what we are laughing at, our laughter must have something rueful in it.

The situations in *The Country Wife* arise from the display of character in action—the character of Pinchwife, of Sparkish, of Horner, of Harcourt, of Margery herself. In this play in particular the resulting fun is at times pretty broad. But because the fun springs directly from the exhibition of character in action *The Country Wife* never lapses below the level of pure comedy. Let the amusement

result not from broader, but from more primitive situations, situations given to us arbitrarily, for their own sake, and not springing from the *characteristic* behaviour of the various *dramatis personae*, let these situations be more absurd than the situations of real life, and comedy has coarsened into farce. Pure comedy is always marked by delicacy even when its situations are indelicate. I mean, pure comedy always has a certain subtlety. But to subtlety farce remains a stranger. It is indeed possible that the frontiers of pure comedy have been overstepped and we are inside the realm of farce whenever, either from across the footlights or in an armchair at home, we are not charmed at the same time as we are amused. In *The Way of the World* the vivacity and verbal ingenuity of the characters are a main source of charm, in *She Stoops to Conquer* the sentiment and the way in which the character of Marlow unfolds. The charm of Margery in *The Country Wife* is so pervasive that it somehow infects our impression of the men in the play—Horner, Sparkish, and Harcourt—so that each, although in himself repellent, becomes attractive at the same time. It may well be that where any such charm is absent, and the piece does no more than amuse us, we have, not pure comedy, but that bastard comedy—farce.

Do not let me make you imagine that farce is in any way despicable. It can be, as much as pure comedy, a criticism of life—if not of ourselves, then of our institutions. It is worth noticing that, in this respect, the method of farce—English farce—has not altered fundamentally during the last three centuries. Throughout that time English farce displays something of the permanence of the English character. Not only does it go on giving us the same situations, but these situations are brought about and resolved in ways that have not varied. There is a comedy of Ben Jonson's which it is tempting to call a farce. I mean *Epicene or The Silent Woman* (1609), a play which seemed to Dryden, some seventy years after it had been written, to be a model of its kind. I do not know if Mr. Somerset

Maugham has acquired any of his highly competent skill from studying the dramatic criticism of Dryden, but Maugham's farce *Home and Beauty* (1919) has obvious affinities to *The Silent Woman.* Both plays satirize—or, it would be better to say, burlesque—the business of divorce. It is not the morality or immorality of divorce which they hold up to ridicule. There would be nothing farcical about that. The target of their shafts is the legalist maze that obstructs the obtaining of divorce, the legalist maze that renders getting divorce at once a humiliation and a farce—a farce of real life. Of course in 310 years the legalist maze itself had undergone modifications. And so had stage technique. And so had the audience. In ridiculing the legal machinery of divorce in his day Ben Jonson could not avoid the characteristically Elizabethan seriousness ; and, by the way, the presence of this seriousness in *The Silent Woman* makes it difficult to go on calling that play a farce. To Maugham, completely in the twentieth-century manner, the whole legal paraphernalia of divorce at the time he wrote *Home and Beauty* was so absurd that he contented himself with fooling. All these differences are accidental. In essence the two plays make use of the same theme in order to get a same effect by an identical means.

So far I have been speaking of what there is in plays in prose for us to enjoy and to be moved by, whether we hear them performed in a theatre or read them to ourselves. The kinship between *The Silent Woman* and *Home and Beauty* brings me to say a word of the further enjoyment which we may obtain from plays by examining how they are put together and how their effects are obtained. I said last week, if not before, that once we have read a novel through for the first time, undergoing its effects passively and enjoying it merely for the sake of the story and the presentation of character, we may go back over it and see how its effects have been contrived, how it is arranged, how its big moments are prepared and led up to ; and I said we might do all this because to do it

could yield to us a further enjoyment and at the same time increase our profit. It is thanks to carrying out such analysis that we are likely to improve our taste in novels and to strengthen our judgement. Any play in prose that has the least claim to be literature may be taken as an object of similar analysis. The study of a play in order to see how its effects are contrived may be partly carried out in the theatre. Indeed, it is difficult to judge of the value of dramatic effects and of stage situations anywhere else. We have to see the play performed. But the analysis begun in the theatre should be completed with the text of the play in hand. Only in the course of reading at leisure are we likely to become aware of all the machinery of a particular play and to realize how well this machinery has been made to work.

It is by means of repeated examinations of plays that we shall learn to judge plays. The quality of a play lies primarily in its immediate effect upon us while we view it and listen to it—while it is for us, that is to say, what Aristotle calls the imitation of an action. But at this audition we are readily taken in by effects which, though not necessarily shoddy, fall short of being the best. Examining how plays have been put together will enable us to see what the immediate effects which those plays have upon a spectator and auditor are really worth. We shall discover what are mere stage tricks and what are sources of high emotion, what is merely playing upon shallow conventions about life and what is a true criticism of life. It may perhaps seem odd at first, but it is nevertheless a fact, that the more we come to understand how plays are made and to realize both the possibilities and the limitations of the stage, the more we shall enjoy being one of an audience and watching the performance of a play new to us. Indeed, some acquaintance with what I may call comprehensively by the name of stagecraft is of more aid to the immediate enjoyment of plays than an understanding of the business of making novels is to the immediate enjoyment of novels.

How should we set about getting to understand stage-craft? The only way is to study plays which are recognized to be literature. But to do so we may be tempted to enlist the aid of dramatic criticism. Many people are incited to see, or are deterred from seeing, a new stage production by the notices in the newspapers. At least, so the theatre managers seem to think. And there is also a more pondered dramatic criticism, which offers guidance to the value and significance of plays. Whenever the dramatic critic, however, is dealing with the whole work of a particular playwright, he is insensibly led into generalizations, and against invariably accepting these we should be on guard. We must not hesitate on occasion to question them. For instance, some critics have alleged that the characters of Ben Jonson's comedies—one of which, *The Silent Woman*, I referred to just now—are unreal, artificial, in that each is all of a piece. They have alleged that if Ben Jonson wants to put a miser on the stage, he makes him all miserliness and nothing else; and that, in short, Ben Jonson's comic characters are flat or two-dimensional. To this the American Mr. Harry Levin has very properly replied that to speak of flat or two-dimensional characters in drama is nonsense. Stage characters are never either flat or round. We may elucidate his statement as follows. No doubt Ben Jonson had a theory of humours, which we do not succeed in explaining if we say that a Jonsonian character's humour made of him a type or that a Jonsonian humour is equivalent to what we now call a mania or a complex. Jonson's characters in, say, *Every Man in his Humour* have a humour for scholarship, for hawking, for bullying a servant, for disturbing a brother-in-law's house, for suspicion and jealousy, or for being angry, and at least once it is humour in the sense in which the periodical *Punch* is reputed to be humorous. But in any event the humours have nothing to do with an absence of realism, as we understand it, in the characters. The fact is, that if Ben Jonson's comedies are comedies of manners, they are so with a

difference. They exhibit the manners of real life, but they are organized according to a convention—a convention peculiar to their author. They never seem so artificial as immediately after the rise of the curtain. In *Volpone* the eponymous hero is made at once to disclose what he is, and to us who behold him to-day he seems at this point to be no more than a diagram. But as the performance goes on, as the play unfolds, we are brought to realize that Volpone the man did not exist when the curtain rose, and that he comes into being *pari passu* as the play does. In fact, the complete play is simply the description of him.

Thus, if dramatic criticism may be useful in helping us to understand the construction of a play, and what its effects are worth as they are felt by an auditor or reader, we yet need to verify whatever a critic tells us. In any event, in order to see how plays are built up, we must go to plays themselves, and for this purpose we cannot do better than go to the plays of Henrik Ibsen, the great Norwegian dramatist of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is contrary to my programme to step outside English literature, but I feel I must mention Ibsen at this point. In the days when he was writing his plays, and again when they were first brought to England, they aroused great excitement. What stirred people about any one of them was the subject. For instance, *A Doll's House* is a play in which a woman with a seemingly excellent husband insists on leaving home so that she may lead a life of her own. In England this appealed to the Suffragettes and moved the old-fashioned to storms of indignation. *Ghosts*, a play about heredity, won the approval of eugenists. To-day the matter of the plays all looks out of date. But Ibsen the expert playwright remains as good and as important as ever. In fact, it is only within recent years, when we were no longer blinded by the topicality of his themes, that we have been able to recognize in him one of the supreme craftsmen of the theatre. If we want to see how a play ought to be put together, we can have no more instructive model than

Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. It will show us not only an admirable stage situation, but also the skilful preparation of, and the leading up to, a situation.

What is a stage situation? We need not go outside the English drama for an answer to the question. One is supplied by Oscar Wilde's comedy of manners, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which, on being revived in London at the time of the outbreak of war, met with overwhelming success. John Worthing is a well-to-do young man living in Hertfordshire with his ward, Cecily Cardew, and her governess. Fond as he may be of seclusion, there are times when he very naturally wants to have a spell in Town. Whenever this happens he accounts for his absence to Cecily by telling her that he must go to London in order to get his brother Ernest—whom Cecily knows only by report—out of a scrape. Cecily has never seen this brother Ernest—for a very good reason. He is an invention. In London Worthing has a friend, a man about town named Moncrieff. One day Moncrieff hears of the existence of Cecily. He quickly finds out that she is eighteen and beautiful. Seizing an opportunity, he gets hold of the address of Worthing's country house. Then, during one of Worthing's visits to Town, he presents himself at this house in the guise of—the imaginary brother. He has not been talking to Cecily for long when Worthing returns. And Worthing is now in deep mourning. His entrance brings about a first-class stage situation. The audience at once understands the significance of this black. Worthing has evidently decided to make an end of his imaginary brother. And indeed he proceeds to announce to Cecily and her governess that Ernest Worthing is dead—has died suddenly in Paris. And he has hardly finished speaking than he is confronted with Moncrieff, who has been accepted by Cecily and her governess a few moments earlier as the brother very much alive. That is the first-class stage situation.

I have now spoken of the comedy of manners and of the comedy of character; together they form the two

main varieties of comedy. I have alluded to farce. I have pointed to the advantages we shall derive from seeing how plays are put together and their effects contrived. I have given an example of a stage situation. It is by noticing the exhibition of manners or the exhibition of character and by attending to these other things about the plays we read that we may read them for profit. The reading of a play is to be undertaken as far as possible in combination with seeing and hearing it performed. As the novels which can yield the most profit, or indeed any profit at all, are those which are well written and which have what I have called significance, so plays. The plays I have so far mentioned all stand in this category. It remains for me to mention a few more, which, if possible, should be both seen performed and read, or, if the opportunity of seeing a performance is denied you, at least read.

Dryden's *Marriage-à-la-Mode* (1672) and his *Amphitryon* (1690) are partly in prose and partly in verse. Perhaps the second is the more brilliant of the two. Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695), which is at present[1] enjoying a highly successful revival in London, is not so sparkling in its dialogue as *The Way of the World*, but it has more of a plot. Valentine is in love with Angelica. But the course of true love does not run smooth. His father, Sir Sampson Legend, tries to win her hand. Moreover, Sir Sampson has a craze for astrology, and he wants to marry his other son Benjamin to the daughter of an amateur astrologer named Foresight, in whose powers of prediction he has great faith. To assist this match he proposes that Benjamin shall have Valentine's estate. Of course true love triumphs in the end. And in addition to a plot *Love for Love* has characters. Sir Sampson, in particular, is an individual figure. However, in Sir John Vanbrugh's comedy, *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), the characters impress us as being a good deal nearer to actual humanity. One, Sir John Brute—a raw country squire of his time—is a masterpiece. *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1706) by George

[1] June 1943.

Farquhar is a play delightfully gay and full of movement. I could not see it performed too often, so long as it was performed well. Much as I enjoy it, however, I confess to being even fonder of *The Rivals* (1775), the first play to have been written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. As for Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, which I have named as being the last great comedy in English till we come down to the present day, I need hardly say that it is a play we should all get to know well.

You will probably not wish me to conclude this lecture without some brief reference to the stage to-day. If I have recommended going to the prose drama of the second half of the seventeenth century and to that of the eighteenth in order to form our judgement and taste, it is only to enable us to extract the maximum enjoyment of which we are capable from the contemporary stage.

Many people have declared that we possess a leading dramatist to-day in the person of Bernard Shaw. Certainly Shaw's great age now entitles him to respect. He is at present eighty-seven.[1] At times, moreover, his work is unquestionably brilliant. But when it is viewed as a whole its inequalities become evident. The first act of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, for instance, is good. In fact, it is so good that, by contrast, the rest of that play seems to be worse than it quite possibly is. *The Devil's Disciple*—the first of the Shavian plays to be popular in America—is well-constructed. But it is marred by an almost farcical hanging scene. This is a lapse of taste. Hanging, however you look at it, is no laughing matter. When we can see how it is not only a lapse of taste but also a failure of the dramatic instinct to put on the stage the mockery of an execution, we are well on the way to an understanding of literature and of its relation to life. Many competent judges hold *Candida* to be Shaw's best play. As a piece of stagecraft it is no doubt very good. But as a comedy it surely suffers from an element of cheapness. The three male characters—the poet, the parson and the business

[1] June 1943.

man—all have about them something false. Realism may be all right, and a stage convention may be all right. But these characters are neither one nor the other. They are pseudo-realistic. I was delighted to discover only the other day that a highly sensitive critic, the late C. E. Montague, declares Shaw's best play to be indisputably *Arms and the Man*. I was delighted, because it is what I have long thought myself. The first act of *Arms and the Man* is inexpressibly brilliant. It cannot be praised too highly. Furthermore, unlike *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Arms and the Man* goes on being good. The remaining two acts may not equal the first. That would be asking a lot. But they are not unworthy of it. *Arms and the Man* stands high among contemporary plays.

Another well-known name in the theatre to-day is that of Somerset Maugham. The long runs, the many revivals of Maugham's plays, testify to his mastery of the technique of the stage, as much as to his instinctive gauging of the popular taste. But he himself would not pretend that the great majority of these pieces would repay being read and re-read, except by aspiring playwrights. He himself has said that he looks upon the writing of a satisfactory West End play as simply the production of a piece of journalism. He means that such plays are best intended to appeal only to the mood of a day, since they are destined in any event to have but a short life. This is a truth about contemporary writing in general, and not merely about the contemporary drama. It is a truth which those of us who have not formed their judgement and taste through a study of the great literature of the past are apt to be unaware of. Not only most West End theatrical successes, but also most new books, are not merely very soon forgotten; they are now written to be, so to speak, forgotten as quickly as possible. From the standpoint of these lectures there is accordingly nothing whatever to be said about them.

As regards the work of Maugham in particular, however, shortly before he bade farewell to the stage some eight

or nine years ago, he wrote one or two plays which were evidently more ambitious in intention than their predecessors. In a sense, the measure of the ambitiousness inspiring them was their failure to draw an audience. To see why at least one of them failed in this respect should be instructive for our understanding of the drama in general. Let us then consider Maugham's play entitled *For Services Rendered.*

The scene of this play is the England fit for heroes to live in which, as we know, resulted from the war of 1914–1918. The characters are appropriate to this scene. They belong altogether to their time, and indeed to their generations. Leonard Ardsley is a prosperous country solicitor—one of those persons of whom it was said in the early post-war years that they stood witnesses to the generosity and patriotism of the older men—the men who were too old to fight. They were said to be men who had exacted a fair interest on the money they lent the Government, but had asked no return whatever for the lives of their sons. As it happens, Ardsley's son, Sydney, has not been killed in the war. He has only lost his sight. But the aftermath of 1918 did not show itself only among young men. Young women were its victims also. Ardsley has three daughters—Sydney's sisters. Eva, the eldest, now thirty-three, is still unmarried. Her lover lies buried in Flanders, and she is faithful to his memory. Or possibly it is that there is nobody else ready to marry her. But Eva is not fitted to be an old maid. In the end she goes mad. The second daughter, Ethel, has, indeed, found a husband in spite of the war, but she has married beneath her. The youngest, Lois, is now only twenty-six. She too finds no young man of her own kind with whom she can fall in love. But she is offered an alternative—either to marry a retired naval commander, Collie Stratton, whose garage is in financial difficulties, or else to become the mistress of the war profiteer, Wilfred Cedar, who for her sake is willing to desert his wife. Stratton is confident—probably over-confident—that the loan of

£200 would not only save him from criminal bankruptcy, but also enable him to get on his feet. Both old Ardsley and the profiteer Cedar refuse to help him. Yet although Cedar will not put his hand in his pocket to the extent of a mere £200 in order to save Stratton, he is quite ready, in order to win Lois, to settle on her the nest-egg of £20,000. I have already said that Eva goes mad. Collie Stratton kills himself. Lois coolly weighs her prospects, and finally decides to go away with Cedar. She doesn't like him. He is not the sort a girl would like. But he is rich, and then also, as Lois herself remarks, a woman can have tremendous power over a man for whom she does not care two pins. I have not mentioned old Ardsley's wife. She is resolute and hard. Lois obviously takes after her.

In short, *For Services Rendered* contains no single character that is pleasant. This is the clue to the failure of the play on the stage. You remember that we noticed how most of the characters in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* are unpleasant, but also that this unpleasantness is, as it were, neutralized—even more than it is counterbalanced—by the exquisite charm of Margery. Maugham himself, before he wrote *For Services Rendered*, had peopled another play with unpleasant characters. The play is *Our Betters*, and it was a great stage success. In *Our Betters*, however, there are not only unpleasant characters. There are two others—an unspoiled girl with ideals and a decent young man. They have small parts, and it might seem at a first glance that they are not of great importance. Yet I venture to suggest that it was their presence in the play that ensured its success. They give the play a balanced humanity; they redeem it. But there are no unspoiled girls or unspoiled young men in *For Services Rendered*. And that is, I fancy, why the play failed. Without them, *For Services Rendered* is not a faithful reflection of England in the years following 1918. It offers us a one-sided and falsely sombre picture. The public is sensitive in such matters, and it stayed away.

The theatre-going public may be inarticulate. It may not be able to put into words the grounds of its rejection of a play. It does not understand the niceties of dramatic criticism. But it has instinct, and the more familiar we grow with the drama in general and the more we appreciate the art of the stage, the more likely we shall be to recognize that on this occasion the instinctive judgement of the London theatre-going public was sound.

We must not imagine that playwrights such as Shaw and Maugham in any way stand alone in the contemporary English theatre. A much less known but brilliant dramatist was Harold Chapin, who, if my memory does not betray me, was killed in action at some moment between 1914 and 1918. His full-length comedy, *The New Morality* achieves the exhibition of character with as great a delicacy and subtlety as the stage is likely to allow. His one-act plays give him some affinity to the later Maugham. They have a ferociously sardonic bite. But they also have humanity.

The most important contemporary English dramatist may well be " C. K. Munro." That is not his real name but it is the name he affixes to his plays. C. K. Munro has two distinct styles. His play entitled *At Mrs. Beam's* is in what may be called his popular style. I do not mean that technically it does not differ from a piece by Pinero, Sutro, Jones, or Maugham. On the contrary; technically it is akin to the work of the Russian Anton Tchekov. There are a good many characters and during all the earlier part of the play they seem to be talking at random and, what is seemingly worse, at cross-purposes. Yet all the time the action is heading somewhere, in due course its direction becomes clear, and the issue is one which must delight a sensitive audience. *At Mrs. Beam's* is not, then, a simple play. I say it is in Munro's popular style because, in contradistinction to some of his other dramatic work, it contains no " symbolism."

" Symbolism " is a dreadful word. I shall replace it with another in a moment. The plays by Munro which

contain " symbolism " can be said to be in his intellectual style, in contrast to what I have called the popular style of *At Mrs. Beam's*—an intellectual style solely as regards the theory inspiring it. The plays themselves are intended, exactly as are ordinary plays, to appeal directly to the feelings of an audience, and not exclusively to their intellects. The first and the most widely known of them is called *The Rumour*. It is a specimen of the English brand of that stage expressionism which originated in Germany. Expressionism—that is the word which I now put in the place of " Symbolism." The first expressionist playwright was the German Ernst Toller. Expressionism may be said to aim at an effect of embracing the whole of the life of the day by means of a large number of more or less short scenes expressive—note the word—expressive of much that lies far beyond them. In fact, the actual scenes making up an expressionist play are slices of vaster scenes embracing stock exchanges, government offices, factories, the crowded streets, and therefore clean outside the compass of the theatre. The author's object is, by means of the scenes in the play, to bring those other and vaster scenes into the consciousness and imagination of the audience. Gradually, as with a play such as *At Mrs. Beam's*, a general impression is built up; only it is a general impression much more comprehensive than the one built up by *At Mrs. Beam's*. What has at first seemed fragmentary and disconnected fits into place in some large whole.

The Rumour reflects what was the popular feeling in the years from 1919 to about 1930. It seeks to move the audience with suggestions of the evil power exerted by big business, foreign investments, armament makers, profiteers, and ambitious politicians and diplomatists who, in the popular fancy, are credited with a readiness to play on nationalist feeling. To tell you what *The Rumour* attempts in this way is to expose to you the weakness of English dramatic expressionism. It can only try to move an audience with the expression of a huge complexity by over-simplifying and hence utterly falsifying that

complexity. *The Rumour* in this way does not rise above the imaginings of a Hyde Park pacifist.

English expressionism may of course progress. But at present it is still crude—crude not so much in technique as in subject-matter. I may admit to you that, for my part, I strongly prefer contemporary plays such as *At Mrs. Beam's* or as Harold Chapin's *The New Morality* to plays like *The Rumour;* and I doubt very much if expressionism will be integrated in the main tradition of the English stage. Time alone can show if I am right. And in the meanwhile such reservations are not meant to minimize the immediate importance of C. K. Munro.

PLAYS CITED

William Congreve, *The Way of the World.*
William Congreve, *Love for Love.*
Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer.*
William Wycherley, *The Country Wife.*
Sir John Vanbrugh, *The Provok'd Wife.*
Ben Jonson, *Epicene or The Silent Woman.*
George Farquhar, *The Beaux' Stratagem.*
John Dryden, *Marriage-à-la-Mode.*
John Dryden, *Amphitryon.*
R. B. Sheridan, *The Rivals.*
R. B. Sheridan, *The School for Scandal.*
Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House.*
Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts.*
Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck.*
Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest.*
Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma.*
Bernard Shaw, *The Devil's Disciple.*
Bernard Shaw, *Candida.*
Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man.*
W. S. Maugham, *Home and Beauty.*
W. S. Maugham, *For Services Rendered.*
W. S. Maugham, *Our Betters.*

Harold Chapin, *The New Morality.*
C. K. Munro, *At Mrs. Beam's.*
C. K. Munro. *The Rumour.*

VOLUMES OF PLAYS:

In the Oxford World's Classics:
The *Comedies* of William Congreve.
Eighteenth-Century Comedy.
The *Plays* of R. B. Sheridan.
The Nonesuch Ben Jonson. Ed. Henry Levin.

SEVENTH LECTURE

POETIC DRAMA

WE reach this evening a sort of turning-point in these lectures. Six of them have now been devoted to considering prose literature. Poetry is the subject of the remaining three. It is in the course of dealing with the drama that we are brought to pass naturally from speaking of prose to speaking of verse. There are, as we all know, plays in prose and plays in verse, and it is desirable, when seeing how we may read for the most profit, to neglect neither. The former we dealt with last week. This evening we turn to the latter.

To begin with, it is reasonable to ask: Why should there be plays in verse? Is it not the aim of the theatre to give us the illusion that we are watching and listening to an imitation of real life on the stage? If so, in real life people do not speak in verse. To this objection against plays being in verse the answer is that only in some plays is the aim to give the audience the illusion that they are watching and listening to an imitation of real life, and even in those plays it is never more than a minor aim. The chief aim of all drama is simply to move the audience to experience certain feelings. This aim can sometimes be attained by means of prose; at other times it is only to be attained by means of verse. The choice of medium depends on the nature of the feelings aimed at, and these are not invariably the same. How they differ we shall come to in a moment. Meanwhile I must point out that in any event to say that the theatre ever seeks to give the audience the illusion that it is watching and listening to an imitation of real life is in itself too crude a statement.

So-called realism on the stage is but one of many stage conventions. All performance of drama, by reason of the very conditions under which it must take place, is,

in reference to real life, artificial. I do not mean that it is impossible for the audience in a theatre to have the illusion it is watching and hearing real people in the throes of real experience. On the contrary, from childhood onwards we all of us—or very nearly all of us—go to a play prepared to accept the necessary conventions of the stage, and thus succeed unconsciously in forgetting that it is a stage we behold. We undergo what Coleridge has called "a suspension of disbelief." So in calling "realism" a convention I do not mean to deny its power. What I do mean is that the more adult our apprehension of the happenings simulated on the stage during the performance of a play, the more we are aware of feeling instinctively that these happenings are life at a remove from real, everyday life—that they are more concentrated and more intense. The convention known as realism in no way affects our having this instinctive feeling. If anything, it strengthens it. In the years immediately before August 1914 and the outbreak of an earlier war a new realism had invaded the English stage. The vanguard among new dramatists had discarded the soliloquy and the aside. They were making characters not only talk sitting down but very often sit with their backs to the audience. These innovations were intended to be, and were then accepted as being, an increase in stage realism. Actually, without in the least disturbing the "suspension of disbelief," they served only to affirm the tacit awareness of the audience that in attending the performance of a play it was being present at an imitation of life more concentrated and more intense than the life which each of the individuals composing it put aside the moment the curtain went up and they settled, in rapt and serried rows, to stare out of the dark at the brilliantly illuminated make-believe framed in the proscenium arch. But the tacit awareness occurs without these aids, and complete realism in externals is not only unattainable in the theatre; it is superfluous. An audience invariably gathers together in a theatre only too ready to lose itself in the play, and nothing but the

badness of a play can prevent it from doing so. Hence if some plays are in prose, it cannot be by reason of any fear on the part of playwrights that verse must make the audience unable to accept the characters as real.

Shakespeare's contemporary Ben Jonson was dissatisfied with the fantastic comedies, the wide-ranging chronicle histories, and the excessively horrifying so-called tragedies, which he found being performed in the Elizabethan theatre when he himself first took a hand at writing plays. He declared that the stage should busy itself, not with the material taken for these plays,

> But deeds, and language, such as men doe use;
> And persons, such as Comoedie would chuse,
> When she would shew an Image of the times,
> And sport with humane follies, not with crimes.

Yet if we glance at the five most successful of Jonson's nine comedies, we see that two of them are in verse, one in verse and prose mixed, and only two of them entirely in prose. It is true that in Jonson's day, and indeed long after him, verse was considered appropriate for comedy as much as for so-called tragedy. But I should like to suggest that that is not why Ben Jonson did not put all his comedies into prose. Let us glance at two of them.

The scene of *Epicene or The Silent Woman*—of which I spoke already last week—is London, the London of Jonson's own time. Morose, "a gentleman that loves no noise," vows to disinherit his nephew, Sir Dauphine Eugenie, and to marry. So Sir Dauphine causes Morose to hear of a woman lodged near him who is so "thrifty of her speech" that she "spends but six words a day" and these are spoken very softly. No sooner has a mock marriage taken place than "the Silent Woman" appears to be of loose morals and the house of Morose is filled with clangour and tumult. He will give almost anything to get the marriage undone, and, on Dauphine's promise to arrange this, readily agrees to settle £500 a year on him at once and to bequeath to him the rest of his fortune. Thereupon Dauphine takes off "the Silent

Woman's" wig and she stands forth a boy. There are also three "Ladies Collegiates" and a character named Sir Amorous La Foole, who is the butt of some horseplay. And there is the fooling I mentioned last week—the fooling over the complications involved in any attempt to get a marriage annulled. Altogether it is quite clear that *Epicene or The Silent Woman* is a comedy of manners bordering on farce. It is in prose.

The scene of *Volpone or The Fox* is Venice. Jonson himself has summed up the plot with admirable terseness :

V olpone, childless, rich, feigns sick, despairs,
O ffers his state to hopes of several heirs,
L ies languishing. His parasite receives
P resents of all, assures, deludes, then weaves
O ther cross-plots, which ope themselves, are told.
N ew tricks for safety are sought : they thrive ; when, bold,
E ach tempts the other again, and all are sold.

From the moment the curtain goes up on Volpone, the miser, addressing his gold :

O thou son of Sol,
But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,
With adoration, thee, and every relic
Of sacred treasure in this blessèd room,

the whole action has an exotic opulence. The play is utterly unreal, and yet it is by means of the unreality that the character of Volpone is gradually set before the audience, till, in that moment at the end of the fifth act in which justice confiscates his wealth for the benefit of a hospital and condemns him to prison, this character at last stands forth in its totality. As *The Silent Woman* is a comedy of manners in the local, contemporary scene and the treatment is burlesque, so *Volpone* is a comedy of character with the character exhibited through the unfolding in an exotic scene of an action at once diagrammatic, as it were, and extravagant. It is in verse.

If, then, any guidance is supplied by these two comedies of Ben Jonson's, we may say that any play the action of which must appear to the audience exotic, extravagant,

artificial, and the scene of which is remote in place or time, is better in verse than in prose. London, some of its recognizable social types, farcical caricature—those call for prose. Venice, a characterization of universally human application (Volpone might be of any nation) achieved by letting fancy embroider a kind of diagram—these demand verse. The same lesson may be drawn from Shakespeare. His exquisite but matter-of-fact comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the rollicking *Merry Wives of Windsor* are almost entirely in prose; the romantic comedy, *Twelfth Night*, and the fantastic comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are both mainly in verse.

Yet that is only one distinction which we can recognize between plays in prose and poetic drama. To-day comedies are invariably written in prose; tragedy, or anything approaching tragedy, it will never be possible to set forth adequately except through poetry. That is a second and possibly more important distinction. There are two levels, so to speak, of dramatic reality. On the first of the two levels prose is appropriate; on the second verse is essential. On whichever level a play operates, the objective is invariably, as I have said, to excite in the audience certain feelings. But on one level these feelings are excited by means of an imitation of the externals of life; on the other by means of what the action brings the characters to disclose of their internal longing, anguish, and ecstasy, and of their own feelings about the workings of fate and the destiny of man.

What I try to sum up in the expression "the externals of life" should be perfectly clear if we cast our minds back to the contents of some of the plays which we considered last week. In *The Way of the World*, for example, Mirabell and Millamant do not put their real feelings into words. If anything, their words serve to disguise those feelings, and when dwelling on *The Way of the World* last week I was able to quote Hazlitt saying that the real feelings of Mirabell and Millamant no more than peep out, as it were, from the foliage of their speech. In fact, the play

reminds us of Voltaire when he declared that men employ speech only to conceal their thoughts. But even if Mirabell and Millamant did voice what they were really thinking and feeling, their thoughts and feelings would turn out to be entirely to do with the matter in hand. This is what happens in *She Stoops to Conquer*. In this comedy the characters indulge freely in asides, and an aside is accepted as being the statement of a character's real thoughts or feelings. Here, however, the asides are all the expression of thoughts or feelings about outward behaviour or its effects. They are all confined to their occasions. "Egad, she has hit it sure enough!" "Egad, I don't quite like this chit!" "All's well, she don't laugh at me." "By heaven! she weeps." "This simplicity bewitches me." Those are the kind of asides uttered by Marlow. And Miss Hardcastle's are of the same kind. "I believe he begins to find out his mistake." "Generous man! I now begin to admire him." In short, whether containing asides and soliloquies or not, any play which confines itself to exhibiting the mutual interactions of the characters upon one another is a play which excites feelings in the audience by means of an imitation of the externals of life. It is only through such interactions of character on character that there can arise the stage situation, the nature of which I illustrated last week from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. And it has become traditional in the English theatre, and indeed abroad as well, to confine the matter of plays to these interactions. That is why to-day plays are habitually in prose. Any well-known contemporary piece will prove, on examination, to deal with nothing else. We have only to think of Maugham's *For Services Rendered*, the plot of which I summarized last week. *For Services Rendered* is too grim to be considered purely comic. There is a suicide in it. So there is in Galsworthy's *Loyalties*. A rich young Jew strives to get accepted in pre-1914 English society. He does not succeed. The men hereditarily in possession of country houses, the army, and the clubs,

go on treating him as an outsider. Nevertheless, one of them does not hesitate to rob the Jew of £1,000 in order to pay off a mistress, and tries to brazen out his theft by insulting the Jew. But the truth cannot be hidden, and once his shame is known the thief shoots himself. This brief summary of the plot is enough to show that *Loyalties*, exactly like *For Services Rendered*, considers human beings solely in their social relations and that its action is built out of the mutual interactions of its characters. In this both plays are typical of the non-comic modern drama—the drama not only of England, but of the whole Western World. The plays of Ibsen and Tchekov, of Hauptmann and Pirandello, come into the one category as unmistakably as do those of Henry Arthur Jones, Pinero, Shaw, Galsworthy, and Priestley. So does, for instance, Granville-Barker's *Waste*. Such a play as Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is no real exception, in spite of its splendid suggestion of the fundamental sadness of human destiny. As its language is a semi-poetic prose, so its action bridges the tragic depths. It does not plumb them. As its characters, in keeping with the legend, are primitive, so its emotion is sketchy. And it is because the modern drama confines itself to the clash of social interactions that prose has come more and more to be the only form of speech audible in the theatre. The purely social aspects of life, the mutual interactions of character on character, poetic drama does not much bother about. In the main it operates on another level of dramatic reality. It is concerned with the depths, not the surface, of life. Contrast with some high moment in any modern prose play the words uttered by Prince Henry in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II*, when he is sitting beside his sleeping father, the King:

> Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow,
> Being so troublesome a bedfellow?
> O polisht perturbation! golden care!
> That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide
> To many a watchful night!—sleep with it now

Yet not so sound and half so deeply sweet
As he whose brow with homely biggen[1] bound
Snores out the watch of night. O majesty!
When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
Like a rich armour worn in heat of day,
That scalds with safety. By his gates of breath
There lies a downy feather which stirs not:
Did he suspire, that light and weightless down
Perforce must move.—My gracious lord! my father!
This sleep is sound indeed; this is a sleep
That from this golden rigol hath divorced
So many English kings. Thy due from me
Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously:
My due from thee is this imperial crown,
Which, as immediate, from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me.

Remember that when Prince Henry speaks thus, the King his father is not dead; he only seems to be. Here, therefore, is a young man who cannot wait to be sure of the hour of his succession before he seizes the crown. In the bedside watch his inmost thoughts come right out into the light of day. We are in presence of the usually hidden depths of life. We are listening to a direct expression of the internal reality. The crown is a deplorable burden for another; no burden once it may be his. And that, we can say, is why poetic drama has to be in verse. It has to be poetry, because, far more than prose, poetry is evocative of this internal reality in ourselves: it expresses the depths, as opposed to the surface, of life. The reality, the depths, are emotional, and poetry is the evocator of its hearer's emotion. The expression being in the form of poetry, the emotion of the audience is instantly excited and is instantly responsive.

In attaining to this level of dramatic reality, English poetic drama is akin to classical Greek tragedy. In fact, it derives from this tragedy as the modern drama derives (through the Romans) from classical Greek comedy. I remarked last week that English comedy had not altered

[1] Sc. nightcap.

damentally in the course of the last three centuries. For that matter, comedy in general has remained fundamentally the same for 2,400 years. The French seventeenth-century tragic dramatist Racine was able to write a comedy with French characters by simply adapting almost without change the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, and the adaptation remains to-day ever fresh and entertaining. But, unlike Greek comedy, Greek tragedy has not been perpetuated. Greek tragedy came to an end with the rest of the glory that was Greece. In all its peculiarities Greek tragedy has never been imitated. For it was a form of drama half song, half speech. The singing was done by a chorus, which played the part of an ideal spectator and sang its comments. The speech was spoken by at first a protagonist only, then by him and an antagonist as well, and to the end by no more than a few characters. Furthermore, every Greek tragedy was composed according to certain principles which were no doubt expanded as time went on, but which in their essence were seldom departed from. Prominent among these principles was that of respect of the unities. There are in drama three unities: the unity of time, the unity of place, the unity of action. A play respects the unity of time when its action is continuous and would require, in order to occur in reality, no longer than the play takes to perform, or, at most, no more than one "revolution of the sun." The unity of place means that there is no change of scene. The unity of action means that there is in a play only one action. Another equally important principle for Greek tragedy was that the protagonist—its chief figure—must be an important personage, a demigod, a king, or at least a king's daughter. Upon an Athenian audience the performance of a tragedy had a peculiar effect. When analysed by Aristotle, this effect was found to be what he called a *catharsis*. That is to say, the audience came away from the performance with—let us call it its potential—its potential of indeterminate emotion released and dissipated through its having been moved to both pity and

terror. The experience of both pity and terror released all the pent-up feeling of the Athenian audience and sent it away relieved and satisfied.

The singing, the small number of characters, observance of the unities, the exalted station of the protagonist, the cathartic effect—all that, as well as the verse, went to the making of Greek tragedy; and, as I say, nowhere else and at no other time has drama been composed that was exactly identical with it. Latin dramatists, French dramatists in the seventeenth century, and finally English dramatists—notably Dryden—did write plays in verse in which the unities are respected and in each of which the chief character is an exalted personage. The number of characters is unlimited, and in such French and English plays there is no chorus or parts for a chorus to sing. To these later poetic dramas the name of tragedy may nevertheless be applied. But to call by this name most of the poetic dramas composed during the greatest epoch in the history of the English stage—that is to say, during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I—is only to promote confusion. The dramatists concerned certainly put the name to their works. Some even coined the name "domestic tragedy," which is a contradiction in terms; for to apply to a play the epithet "domestic" is to imply that its chief character is not an exalted personage, and a play whose chief character is not an exalted personage cannot be a tragedy. That is to say, such a play fails to excite in the audience any tragic emotion, even though it may provoke some kind of catharsis. Thus most Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists used the name "tragedy," but the thing itself they do not supply. What they supply is poetic drama of another kind—one for which we have no name. This does not mean that poetic dramas of this kind, differing though they do from tragedy by their content and arrangement, fail to operate, as tragedy operates, on the higher level of dramatic reality. On the contrary—and from the standpoint of reading for profit we need to impress this on ourselves strongly—the Eliza-

bethan poetic dramas in question do succeed in putting the audience in the presence of an extraversion of the depths of life.

A brief summary of some one Greek tragedy will make clear how all such tragedies concentrate exclusively on exciting in the audience a specific emotional experience. For instance, no summary can omit the protagonist's cry of the soul in the *Electra* of Sophocles or disguise that the play is nothing else but this cry, put forth pure and unalloyed. Electra is exhibited deploring years of ill-treatment at the hands of her mother, Clytemnestra; longing to see avenged the death years ago of her father Agamemnon at the hands of the same Clytemnestra and Clytemnestra's paramour Aegisthus; shuddering to realize that she herself resembles this detested mother; fearing that she will relent towards her; and then fearing that the instrument of vengeance, her mother's and Agamemnon's son, her own brother, Orestes, is going to fail her; and so on, right up to the final and awful moment when, vengeance having been at last carried out in all its bloody horror, she discovers that now, when she has fulfilled the desire by which she was obsessed for so long, which she was spurred on to see fulfilled by some irresistible inner urge, she has not obtained relief, she has not found peace. All that, which is the tragedy, is bare, plain, direct, free of the least irrelevance. We cannot conceive a more perfect unity of action. It is evident to us that the emotion to which a performance of the *Electra* moved its audience must have been pure, pure as the cry in it of the protagonist's soul. The whole play evidently ministers to this emotion and it contains nothing to adulterate or dilute this emotion. And, as I say, the *Electra* is typical of Greek tragedy as a whole. Greek tragedy was composed with but a single end in view, and that end it attained triumphantly. How different are most of the poetic dramas of the Elizabethans!

To see the extent of the difference it is enough to glance at a few of them.

The eponymous hero of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* orders vast massacres, laughs at the number of men, women, and children he has caused to be slain, burns down a town to celebrate the funeral of his wife, and at the same time in his grief threatens heaven with his rage. He takes the Emperor Bajazet prisoner, puts him in a cage, uses him as a footstool, taunts him with morsels of food held out on the point of his sword. Bajazet dashes out his brains against the bars of the cage. At the sight of his corpse Zabina, his wife, goes out of her mind and brains herself too.

The Jew of Malta is another play of Marlowe's. Barabas, the hero, falls into a cauldron of boiling water which he has prepared for his enemies. His creature is even more horrible than he is himself.

The heroine of *The Spanish Tragedie*, by Thomas Kyd, is Bellimperia. A first lover of hers, Don Andrea, has already died by violence before the action of the play begins. We see her and young Horatio captivate one another. But by now Don Balthazar is her suitor also. He decides, with the support of her brother, to rid himself of a rival. With two accomplices they surprise Horatio one night keeping tryst with her in her garden. They kill him. She is not content to bewail their cruelty. She and Horatio's father, old Marshal Hieronimo, swear to avenge the crime. They persuade the two murderers to join them in acting a play. In the course of the performance Bellimperia stabs first one of them and then herself. Hieronimo kills first the other, then Bellimperia's father, and finally himself.

Beatrice, beautiful daughter of the governor of the castle of Alicante, is the heroine of *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton. She is affianced by her father to the Lord Alonso. Alas for him, she has already fallen in love with Lord Alsemero. In the governor's suite is an adventurer named De Flores, a man with a dark, pustulous, terrifying face. Beatrice loathes him. But she has noticed him hovering obsequiously about her.

It occurs to her to make use of him. She asks him to save her from marriage to Alonso, and promises to reward him with gold. Alonso promptly dies. De Flores goes to Beatrice and claims his reward. Not the gold she has promised, but she herself is what he wants. She offers to treble the quantity of gold. He refuses. He carries her off. Nevertheless she marries her lover Alsemero. Then, before very long, Alsemero discovers how Alonso was disposed of, and he repudiates Beatrice in horror. In the meanwhile, she has gradually come under the spell of De Flores. His repulsiveness, growing familiar to her, has become attraction. They are together when they are both apprehended. Swiftly De Flores makes certain that they shall be spared trial and execution. He fatally stabs first her, then himself.

John Webster's *The Dutchesse of Malfy* takes its title from a woman all goodness and innocence, who, through marrying beneath her, has the misfortune to incur the deadly hate of her two brothers. They harry her to madness and death. In their persecution of her they are served by an inhuman monster named Bosola. She is made to clasp unintentionally a dead hand. The inmates of a madhouse are let loose in her palace. Her husband and her children are slain, and then their wax effigies are abruptly uncovered before her.

I could go on. The instances afforded by these five plays of the exhibition of violence and the piling up of horrors could easily be multiplied. They are typical of Elizabethan poetic drama. It is of little use to speculate on how dramatists then became infatuated with violence or on why they preferred to complicate their plots with extravagances and horrors. Commentators have suggested that the infatuation and preference were imposed on them by the tastes of the playgoing mob, a mob coarse, illiterate, and revelling in the spectacle of suffering. There is also the fact that many of the plots were obtained from Italy and Spain, lands of violent passion, bitter feuds, appalling vices, and many a dark and cruel crime. Such

matters are beside the point. What demands notice from the standpoint of reading for profit is the contrast between the action of such plays and the action of classical Greek tragedies. In the latter the action, as we have seen, is pared down to essentials and is concentrated on achieving a single aim: it is entirely directed to exciting in the audience a specific emotion in the face of a display of human desire, human disappointment, and the inexorable workings of fate. By comparison Elizabethan poetic drama might seem, in the light of the examples I have given you, incapable of any exhibition of the depths, as opposed to the surface, of life. It might seem entirely to miss bringing the characters to disclose their internal longing, anguish, and ecstasy, or to reflect aloud on the fulfilment of fate and the destiny of man. The curious thing is, however, that at the same time as such Elizabethan poetic dramas as we have so far glanced at display violence and a steady piling up of horror, they yet are unmistakably on the higher level of dramatic reality. Their violent, restless, and labyrinthine action flowers into moments of high emotion for the audience, just as does the action of a classical Greek tragedy. These so-called tragedies of the Elizabethans do, it turns out, lay bare the inner depths of life. And they are brought to do this, not in spite of their extravagant and over-complicated sequence of incident, but under pressure from precisely their diffuse, complex, and turbid action. The action is what brings them to do so, and they succeed in doing so because they are poetic dramas, they do so through the verse.

Here is Tamburlaine voicing his passion for Zenocrate, whom he makes his queen:

> Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove,
> Brighter than is the silver Rhodope,
> Fairer than whitest snow on Scythian hills,—
> Thy person is more worth to Tamburlaine,
> Than the possession of the Persian crown,
> Which gracious stars have promis'd at my birth....
> Thy garments shall be made of Median silk,
> Enchas'd with precious jewels of mine own,

More rich and valorous than Zenocrate's.
My martial prizes with five hundred men,
Won on the fifty-headed Wolga's waves,
Shall we all offer to Zenocrate,
And then myself to fair Zenocrate.

In these lines Tamburlaine is not protesting his devotion to Zenocrate ; he is not being affected by her presence or by her behaviour to him. That would be the surface of life, the lower level of dramatic reality. He is stating his longing for her, his ecstasy at the thought of her ; he is stating how he feels about her in his inmost being. His words lift the play *Tamburlaine the Great* on to the higher level of dramatic reality.

Then there is Tamburlaine's justly-famed soliloquy :

Nature that fram'd us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds :
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous Architecture of the world :
And measure every planet's wandering course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless Spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

There, too, Tamburlaine is clearly on the higher level of dramatic reality. He sums up in those lines his own and all men's infinite aspiration ; his and their inability to pause and be other than themselves.

In *The Jew of Malta* Barabas the Jew declares in a self-caricature pregnant with emotional effect :

First, be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear ;
Be moved at nothing, see thou pity none. . . .
As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls,
Sometimes I go about and poison wells.

Self-caricature, did I say? No doubt, but caricature, to be successful, must not obliterate the real man, even

though it distorts him. Like Tamburlaine, Barabas is aware that he is launched on a course from which he cannot deviate, that he is, as it were, being driven onwards to his ultimate and ineluctable destruction. He, too, speaks here out of the secret places of his heart and in a moment of inspired lucidity.

And there is the sad cry of the soul in lines which Marlowe puts into the mouth of the heroine of another play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage :*

> If thou wilt stay,
> Leap in mine arms ; mine arms are open wide ;
> If not, turn from me, and I'll turn from thee ;
> For though thou hast the heart to say farewell,
> I have not power to stay thee.

How profound, how moving, is the self-realization and the resignation set forth in those lines ! They are not the speech of a woman explaining to a man that she loves him ; they are the speech of a woman disclosing the nature and state of her most privately treasured spirit. And all these disclosures of inner longing, anguish, and ecstasy, all these recognitions of the power of fate, arise directly out of the action, and but for the action being as it is they in turn could not be.

So in *The Spanish Tragedie* of Thomas Kyd the unfolding of the involved and restless plot provides occasion for the utterance of much impassioned verse. It is only in verse that such passion can be expressed by the characters. For instance, while either mad, or at least simulating madness, Hieronimo soliloquizes in this strain :

> Oh eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears ;
> Oh life, no life, but lively form of death ;
> Oh world, no world, but mass of public wrongs.

It is through the action of the play that Hieronimo's inmost agony of spirit finds the motive of its utterance.

De Flores, that strange and disturbing figure in *The Changeling* of Thomas Middleton, says to Beatrice, the beautiful young woman whose loathing of him has turned into fascination :

Can you weep Fate from its determined purpose?
So soon may you weep me.

There, with the marble fixity of Greek tragedy itself, is the devastating recognition of the fulfilment of destiny! And when it comes home to Beatrice how completely she belongs to him whom she at first loathed, she says:

Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
I ne'er could pluck it from him; my loathing
Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believed.

And there again is the recognition from out the heart of a power beyond ourselves that seems to shape our lives. In *The Changeling*, further, there is the expression of the love that binds a man indissolubly to a woman but that the man has found infinitely ecstatic. De Flores, having killed Beatrice and being about to kill himself, pauses to say:

I loved this woman in spite of her heart. . . .
I thank life for nothing
But that pleasure; it was so sweet to me,
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me.

So in John Webster's *The Dutchesse of Malfy*, the audience cannot fail to catch the elegiac note in such confessions as this:

I am acquainted with sad misery
As the tann'd galley-slave is with his oar.

Or this:

I know death hath ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits.

And when, the duchess at last being dead, one of her two evil brothers exclaims:

Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young,

and his creature Bosola replies:

I think not so; her infelicity
Seem'd to have years too many,

the audience is brought to feel, not only the wretchedness of the duchess's own harried career, but also the horror and weariness of all human existence.

Of course, memorable as each of the passages I have quoted may be, they do not, torn from their context, move us as they would in their proper places. In Elizabethan poetic drama all such poignant utterances find their occasion, as I have said, in the action. It is the action, not in spite of, but with, all its violence and piled-up horrors, that bestows on them their impressiveness and that makes them truly poignant. As the actors, when in the course of a performance they come to the moments of intimate self-revelation, are deep in their parts and thereupon speak with a fire and eloquence to which they have been worked up, so likewise the unfolding of the action gradually keys up the audience to the proper level on which to respond to these moments. Let it be granted that by the side of classical Greek tragedy, with its majestic simplicity and dignity, a great part of Elizabethan poetic drama—the so-called tragedies of Marlowe, Kyd, Middleton, Webster, and others—may at first strike us as being needlessly violent, dark, confused, and extravagant, and also as being horrible to the point of futility. It remains that this poetic drama did and does move the audience of its performance (and that it can also move its readers) to experience an emotion, doubtless different from, but nevertheless not unworthy of ranking with, a true tragic catharsis. Evidently this emotion springs from the poetry. And—let me repeat—that is why such plays have to be in verse.

But although the emotion is directly excited thanks to the poetry, let me insist again that we should not be moved at all were it not for the action. There are pieces of writing—I referred to them in passing last week—which, although in the guise of plays, are nevertheless completely unsuited for performance on a stage. Among the most famous are Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Wordsworth's *The Brothers*, Browning's *Strafford*, Thomas Hardy's *The*

Dynasts. Few Elizabethan poetic dramas, however, come into this category. Perhaps George Chapman's *Conspiracie of the Duke of Byron*, which I saw performed some years ago under the admirable auspices of William Poel, is one of those exceptions. On the stage it does seem to have too little action. But the great majority of Elizabethan dramatists display in the great majority of their plays a very lively sense of the theatre. The plays act well. The dramatists may have been unable to devise anything like a stage situation such as we saw last week to occur in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But then they did not wish to do so. They knew their business. It is that alone which makes their poetry effective. A poetic drama, that is to say, must be as much drama as it is poetry. If most Elizabethan dramatists achieved their emotional effects thanks to plots which demanded the piling up of horrors, we must accept the horrors for the sake of the great moments on the higher level of dramatic reality which result, and be satisfied that we could not have the latter without the former.

When, however, we come to Shakespeare, we see that he was able to excite the emotion without resort to the horrors, and that, as a result, the emotion proves deeper and more satisfying. There are, it is true, horrors in *Titus Andronicus*; there is one scene of horror in *Lear (a scene which invariably fails of its effect for me in the* performance, because I am busy telling myself that the actor is not really being blinded); there is one horrible moment in *Cymbeline*. Nevertheless, from by far the greater part of Shakespeare's work the horrors indispensable to most Elizabethan dramatists are conspicuously absent. In this respect Shakespeare stands alone with George Chapman and Ben Jonson. Shakespeare in particular eschews the physical horrors for the sake of the horrors of the spirit. In *Lear* the blinding of Gloster is a mere incident and of small importance. In *Hamlet* what matters is not the killing of Polonius or the corpses that strew the stage at the end.

Of course, much more than this parsimony of physical horror goes to distinguish the poetic drama of Shakespeare and to make him bestride the realm of English poetry like a Colossus so that other poets but walk under his huge legs. To minimize the deeds of horror in order to magnify the agony of the spirit was only one of his achievements. We are accustomed to say that the hand of Shakespeare is recognizable in a play whenever the poetry spoken by the characters in accordance with the demands of the action is poetry that instantly fills the audience with a swarm of inarticulate feelings. As it happens, the poetry of lesser dramatists does the same. It is with equal incongruity that many of us are inclined to think that Shakespeare was more poet than dramatist and that he inspired his characters with the breath of individual life more easily and successfully than he shaped the action of his plays. Ever since his contemporary, Ben Jonson, declared in conversation that Shakespeare lacked art, there has been a readiness to allege that he was clumsy in the joinery of his scenes. I fancy that the late William Archer seriously supposed Henry Arthur Jones to be more skilful than Shakespeare. But the judgement is ridiculed by the facts. Given the design of the stage in an Elizabethan playhouse—a platform surrounded on three, if not four, sides by the audience—and the material he was led to utilize, the refurbishing of older plays, and so on, it is patent that Shakespeare understood the shaping of an action surpassingly well. Even to-day, when we have come to expect a highly finished joinery not demanded in his time, his loose ends and his so-called improbabilities are of not the slightest consequence in the only test that any play need pass—the effect on the audience of its performance. And how marvellously he is able to lift a bare chronicle on to the higher level of dramatic reality! Let me take one example.

Probably every one in Shakespeare's own time was aware that Richard III had perished on the Field of Bosworth in 1485. Therefore for a play about Richard to

end merely with his death would be tame. The audience would not be sent away with that final feeling of satisfaction at the outcome of the action which it must be the artistic aim of every play to leave behind it as aftermath. How does Shakespeare get over this obstacle? In his *Richard III* he causes the ghosts of Richard's many victims to appear first to him and then to his foe, the Earl of Richmond, as the two leaders sleep beside their respective armies on the night before the battle. The ghosts recall Richard's blood-stained guilt. They presage the Earl's victory. Thanks to this scene, the death of Richard, when presently it occurs, takes on the dignity and power of a fulfilment of Nemesis. For the audience an event foreknown has become an event which, provided we enter into it, excites an emotion of wonder and indefinable dread. To-day there are still people who believe in ghosts. We may be confident that many more believed in them in Shakespeare's time. But even in the sceptic a mention of ghosts or the appearance of a ghost on the stage rouses the atavism of the human race and reproduces the ancient awe of prophecies of good or ill-fortune, of presages of victory or defeat. It is on this that here in *Richard III* Shakespeare relies and to this that he appeals. Whether or not he himself accepted the existence of ghosts is neither here nor there. As a dramatist, he intuitively realized the effectiveness of ghosts in a serious play, and accordingly he introduced them.

In saying that Shakespeare thoroughly understood his business as a playwright, I do not mean to suggest that all his plays are dramatically perfect. Although he towers above every other English poet, his poetry varies in power, fluency, and beauty from play to play, and often within the same play. That is something we come to understand when we have got to know poetry. And as the quality of his poetry varies, so the success of his dramatic art varies. There is one of his plays in which the poetry, the characterization, and the management of the action combine to form his most successful work of art. That play is *Antony*

and Cleopatra. There, if anywhere, is the flower of English poetic drama. If we wish to see how the dramatic element in poetic drama can set off the poetic, and the poetic element in turn can confer on the dramatic its fullest value, *Antony and Cleopatra* is the play we should study.

The plot is all taken from the *Lives* of Plutarch, which in Shakespeare's lifetime—in 1579, to be precise—had been for the first time translated into English by Thomas North, not out of the original Greek, but out of the French of Amyot. Shakespeare makes no attempt to respect the unities of time and place. The action stretches over a decade, and the scene ranges from Egypt to Italy, from Italy to Greece, and back to Egypt. The one unity that Shakespeare does observe is the unity of action. We are never distracted for a moment from the powerful passion which for so long bound the mighty Roman general to the irresistible Egyptian queen. The length of time which the action covers serves to let us follow the changing moods and the gradual evolution that marked the famous and fateful love affair.

At the very opening of the play Philo, a friend of Antony's, makes clear how completely his chief is enslaved and how weak and unworthy his surrender appears in the eyes of the Romans. He says :

> This dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. . . .
> His captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust.

At once we are reminded of Antony's superhuman courage in battle, and of the affection with which he inspired his soldiery, and we are shown how Cleopatra must have appeared in Roman eyes—the queen of an alien people whose proper destiny was to become tributary to Rome. And at once also we notice and are enchanted by the easy yet stately conversational fluency of the verse.

The place is Alexandria and the moment that when Antony is about to learn of the death, away over the sea, of his wife Fulvia. The news, and also anxiety over the enmity which Fulvia, so long as she was alive, had bred between him and Octavius—like himself a triumvir of the Roman Empire—rouse him to the necessity of returning to Rome. Cleopatra, of course, does not want to let him go. She bids him leave her, and in the same breath recalls how they have enjoyed one another's company.

> But bid farewell, and go: when you su'd staying
> Then was the time for words: no going then:
> Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
> Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor
> But was a race to heaven.

Perhaps it is masculine rather than feminine to speak of kissing and gazing as actions transcending time, or to speak of a couple's intentness on one another—the intentness summed up in the image of bent brows—as containing all bliss. Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a woman of brains as well as poetic. This, we should realize, is the dramatic poet's economy. Matthew Arnold refers somewhere to the speed and power of Shakespeare's thinking. Here is an instance of it. Possibly for us the words "eternity" and "bliss," when applied to love, have lost some of the freshness which they may still have borne for Shakespeare's contemporaries. But notice the force of the personal references—"in *our* lips and eyes," "in *our* brows' bent." The eternity and the bliss are made individual, unique.

Antony goes, and once he is away we are shown Cleopatra determined he shall not forget her. Where lay the bewildering sorcery of Cleopatra over such men as Julius Caesar and Antony? Shakespeare helps us to imagine. In his play she is a woman of gigantic spirit. At the end of the first act she calls a servant, and to him she says:

> Get me ink and paper: he shall have every day
> A several greeting, or I'll unpeople Egypt.

Likewise when, later on, a messenger arrives bearing news of Antony, she welcomes him with the words:

> Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears
> That long time have been barren.

Here we have lust summed up with intense force. And what a vigour of spirit! "Or I'll *unpeople* Egypt"; "*ram* thou"; "that long time have been *barren*." She speaks as if her desire would make her burst into fragments, and at the same time she remains altogether a woman—the passive partner.

In the second act Enobarbus, one of Antony's followers, tells the rich Maecenas how she appeared to Antony when she came up the Cydnus river to visit him for the first time. From the first she was determined he should be at her feet.

> The barge she sat in, like a burnisht throne,
> Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As if amorous of their strokes. For her own person
> It beggar'd all description; she did lie
> In her pavilion,—cloth-of-gold of tissue—,
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature: on each side her
> Stood pretty dimpl'd boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did. . . .
> Her gentlewomen, like the Nereids,
> So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
> And made their bends adornings: at the helm
> A seeming mermaid steers: the silken tackle
> Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands
> That yarely frame the office. From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony,
> Enthron'd i' the market place, did sit alone,
> Whistling to the air; which, but for Vacancy,
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in nature.

It is a famous passage, and we don't have to go looking for the reasons of its fame. All the visual and physical

details are in Thomas North's Plutarch, but here, under the spell of the verse and combined with certain abstract touches, they make the audience understand through its sensibility the great act of seduction which brought Antony to Cleopatra's feet. Notice the directness of the description: "Purple the sails." Notice the minuteness of detail compressed into a few words: "pretty dimpl'd boys," "like smiling Cupids." The minuteness is what makes the description so vivid. Notice how extraordinarily effective is the word "burn'd" in the sentence "The barge . . . burn'd on the water."

Another scene, although also taken from Plutarch, ministers to making us feel the fateful grandeur of Antony's attachment. The three triumvirs, Octavius, Lepidus, and Antony, have made peace with the rebellious Pompey. He invites them on board his admiral's barge, and there Menas the pirate calls him aside and says:

> These three world sharers, these competitors,
> Are in thy vessel: let me cut the cable;
> And when we are put off, fall to their throats:
> All then is thine.

Pompey replies that he would not have disapproved if Menas had carried out the suggestion on his own initiative; but that now he knows of it, it must not be done, for he cannot break his word. So it is that, as if by a slender chance, Antony is spared to go back to Egypt. And we are left feeling that nothing but some such deed, encompassing his death, could have kept him from returning ultimately to Cleopatra's side. Words spoken a little earlier by Enobarbus then become as the statement of an inexorable fate:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies.

These lines in their turn deserve admiration. An onlooker speaks, as delicacy requires; and how easy it would

have been to make the onlooker impersonal, to make him speak from outside. But no : it is of the fascination of the queen herself that he speaks.

He speaks of Cleopatra. In the course of the play we have exhibited to us many aspects, not only of the infinite variety of Cleopatra herself, but also of the characters of Antony, Octavius, Lepidus, Pompey, Enobarbus, and others ; and each in turn is furthermore the object of illuminating comment by others among them. In the midst of this lavish story of human nature in the most moving form—high and noble verse celebrating a deathless love—it is the Egyptian queen who is most scrupulously put forward, and who is most closely shown to change—to change with change of mood, with the passage of time, under the influence of circumstances. To begin with, she is the lascivious mistress exerting herself to retain a great and powerful ruler " in her strong toil of grace." She then dwells on the physical and emotional delights which already she has bestowed on him and can bestow again. She is avid of being wooed continually and ever newly won. Then, while Antony is away, she turns into the woman confident of being able to go on captivating at a distance, the woman bent on getting back the lover who deludes himself that he has done with her. She is bent on keeping him mindful of what he misses so long as he stays absent. Possibly, too, she is at this stage the artist in statecraft, anxious not to let so much of the greatness of Rome escape from her. And certainly she is the grass widow yearning for interrupted caresses that have become habitual.

She deserts Antony at Actium before he has given battle, and by then he is so completely bound to her that he at once abandons both his army and his fleet so as to follow desperately after her. Thereupon she loses faith in Antony's political power, and makes overtures to Octavius. The latter despatches to her one Thyreus with mission to seduce her from Antony. When he arrives she remonstrates with him for his

lack of ceremony in announcing himself. A little later, when Thyreus has invited her to state what she requires of Caesar,

> For he partly begs
> To be desired to give,

she invites Thyreus to kiss her hand. Antony, bursting in, surprises her in the act of treachery. He vents his furious anger. And what does Cleopatra then? She at once thinks only of some ruse that shall transform Antony back again into the ardent lover. Thus, throughout the play, she is ever, at Shakespeare's hands, infinitely various and intensely individual.

The love affair of Antony and Cleopatra is at once extraordinary and typical. It is extraordinary in the issues involved, in the intensity of Antony's passion, in the powerful fascination of Cleopatra. It is typical of prolonged love affairs in general in that it was founded on a strong mutual affinity. The existence and operation of this affinity Shakespeare brings home to his audience vividly. Cleopatra can betray Antony time and again, and still be firmly bent on not giving him up. He can heap deserved reproach and abuse upon her, and still be unbreakably attached to her.

It is as the result of one of her lover's tricks that he is brought to his death. Fearing he is estranged from her, and in a desperate attempt to bring him back, she sends word to him that she is dead. The false news crumples him up. He asks his freedman Eros to kill him. Eros prefers suicide. Thereupon Antony throws himself on his own sword. Grievously wounded and dying, but still conscious, he is carried to Cleopatra, now immured in her monument. At the sight of him she becomes, according to Plutarch, as one insane. It is as if only then does she grow aware of the greatness of what she is about to lose. This greatness is another thing Shakespeare makes emotionally real to us.

I have already quoted the words of Philo at the opening of the play.

His captain's heart
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast.

Once his great captain's heart is still, Shakespeare causes both Cleopatra and Octavius to bear tribute to the greatness of Antony. Cleopatra says:

His delights
Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above
The elements they lived in; in his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropt from his pockets.

And Octavius:

The breaking of so great a thing should make
A greater crack: the round world
Should have shook lions into civil streets
And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
Is not a single doom; in the name lay
A moiety of the world.

In these three tributes we have displayed to us, first, the great captain who, great as he is, has yet become enslaved to an African queen—"become the bellows and the fan to cool a gipsy's lust"; next, the great conqueror who has subjugated kingdoms and principalities in the eastern world; and finally the great man. A heart that in the rough and tumble of battle—Roman battle, with its hand-to-hand struggles—has been so great that it has seemed, so to speak, to burst *the buckles of his armour.* The conqueror has, as it were, pocketed so many kingdoms and principalities that they overflow. The man himself is so great that his fall and end should produce a kind of unnatural earthquake. It matters nothing that Octavius Caesar—the real man, not the Shakespearean character—never suspected the world to be round, or that, four lines after calling it round, the Octavius of Shakespeare is also made to look on the world in Roman fashion as being simply the Roman Empire. This is less than nothing by the side of the magnificent image of the great globe so shaken by Antony's removal from it that lions are tossed out of the forests into the streets of cities. Antony and

Octavius had divided the Roman world between them: "In the name lay a moiety of the world."

Hyperbole? Of course hyperbole. For *Antony and Cleopatra* has been written in order to cause its auditors (and readers) to feel, among much else, the elemental greatness of the protagonist (as I may call him). Nothing is more difficult than to indicate human greatness in narrative or drama. Yet here, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the greatness is set before us so starkly that we might almost grasp it in our hands. Keats has spoken of "the indescribable gusto of the Elizabethan voice." It is not Shakespeare's voice alone that vibrates with this gusto. The gusto characterizes the whole of the greatest age England has known. The England of Elizabeth may have been, in one sense, decadent; for it was animated by no constructive and sustaining faith, and it was inspired by no one strong artistic tradition. It was an England clutching at novelty and experiment from abroad. It was eclectic. Nevertheless it was the greatest England of literature. Most poets were dramatists, and they endowed the drama with mighty emotion, and very often with unforgettable characters as well. And this they could do because they understood might and greatness not only with their hearts, but also with their pens. That is how it is that the age gave forth its gusto. Themes and characters were chosen that needed gusto for their expression, and with this gusto hearts and pens responded.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, notably, we have more than gusto. The might and greatness of the characters speak out of them as they stride the stage. They describe the might and greatness of one another, and make us behold what they describe. Their speech has the vigour and vitality of their own gigantic spirit, because the poet who conceived them knew how to breathe this spirit into them. So we are brought truly to feel the greatness of Antony. Yet it is perhaps the greatness and the uniqueness of Cleopatra that are made both more interesting and more moving.

I have spoken of the gradual evolution of the love affair. In reality it is the character of Cleopatra that evolves. At first her infinite variety seems to be mere variety, however fascinating. But on the death of Antony her character takes on direction, it develops and becomes serious. Presently she utters the unforgettable line and a half:

> My desolation does begin to make
> A better life.

It is her desolation that now looks better, less appalling; for now she, almost calm, is able to review it. And it is also her own life—what little is to remain of it—that has become less desolate, that has turned serene. At first the loss of Antony has left her desolate. Now it has made her more real. It has shown her what she herself must do. The subjugation of two Roman Titans, the annexation of kingdoms, the birth of children—all these experiences have left the Shakespearean Cleopatra in a sense unaffected. She has revelled in it all, for it has ministered to her own sense of her wonderful witchery. But none of it has reached down to her roots. It has needed the shock of finding that great Antony actually is dead, the realization that now his going from her has become irrevocable, to bring her up short at the last and to set her face to face for the first time with the seriousness of life and its dread issues.

Only a little while before she had begun to negotiate with Caesar. Now it is he who is lavish in promises to her; for he wants to have her alive to figure in his triumphs. But she, who so recently expected mercy from him, is not now to be deceived. She foresees that in Rome—

> The quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore.

"Squeaking Cleopatra" and "boy my greatness"—again the titanic vitality and vigour issuing from the

mouth of a frail woman. Notice the clause " Antony shall be brought drunken forth " with its four n's, " Antony," " drunken " ; its two rolled r's, " brought," " drunken," and then the word " forth " with another r ; the long vowels in " brought " and " forth." Notice, too, the word " drunken " in " Antony shall be brought drunken forth " : it brings the whole scene imagined in Cleopatra's mind before the eye of auditor or reader. Notice finally the marvellous conversational fluency of the verse, the clauses running on from one line to another, without any sacrifice of metric poetic effect. It is verse which, as it impinges on our sensibility, fills us with emotion for a falling queen preoccupied with the prospect of her humiliation—with the prospective torture of her own feelings.

Thus Cleopatra is wrought up to the pitch of following Antony out of the world.

> Methinks I hear
> Antony call ; I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act ; I hear him mock
> The luck of Caesar, which the gods give man
> To excuse their after wrath.

The last words rescue her imagining from being theatrical. And thereupon the rising seriousness, the increasing gravity of tension, clamp the auditor to his chair. What makes this seriousness and tension infectious and at this juncture pierces him to the quick is of course, to an important extent, the acting, but above all it is the verse. And nothing but verse—poetry—can do this ; and, it may be added, nothing but a particular kind of verse, the blank verse of the poetically mature Shakespeare.

Notice at his hands what an instrument this verse becomes. Cleopatra is about to take leave of life, and she says :

> Husband, I come :
> Now to that name my courage prove my title !

I quote only a line and a half, but how much there is in that line and a half ! It is the first time Cleopatra has called Antony " husband." In Plutarch also she uses the name once only. But there she does so at a moment

when Antony is no doubt dying, but yet is still alive and conscious. She does so when Antony, with the terrible sword wound in his entrails, has been hoisted, weak and bleeding but with his arms stretched out to her, into her monument, and she, in a paroxysm of grief and despair, is disfiguring her face and tearing at her breasts. But in the play it is after Antony is dead, after her desolation has begun to make a better life, when she too is about to die by her own hand, that Cleopatra says "Husband," "Husband, I come." The comparison gives us an insight into the purely dramatic resources of a master playwright at the same time as it helps us to realize the extent of the contribution of the noble verse to the solemnity of our emotion. Uttered now instead of earlier, the word "husband" tells us that the death of Antony has magnified Cleopatra, that this death, in enabling her suddenly to measure the wealth of Antony's immense devotion, has also brought her at last face to face with the seriousness of life and its dread issues.

So, undiminished in cunning, she contrives to cheat Octavius of her appearance in his triumph, and instead follows great Antony into the shades. An asp is at her breast, draining her blood. As she is dying, she murmurs:

> Peace, peace!
> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast
> That sucks the nurse asleep?

The death of Antony has been stoical, and therefore in some measure a posturing in the presence of death. He says:

> Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done,
> And we must sleep. . . .
> The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep
> The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
> Heart, once be stronger than thy continent,
> Crack thy frail case!—Apace, Eros, apace.—
> No more a soldier: bruisèd pieces, go;
> You have been nobly borne.

The Renaissance had brought Stoicism into fashion, and more than one Elizabethan dramatic character dies

thus, stoically, masking both death and himself, and playing a part. But the death of Cleopatra is no such typical death: it is entirely her own; it is womanly, but it is also unique. After a life of love, of extravagance, of intrigue, of betrayal, Cleopatra undergoes, with the removal of Antony, a kind of conversion. It is as if, for the first time, she were fully alive. She has suddenly grown aware of what life is. And it is in the midst of this new awareness that she takes leave of life. And appropriately her death is her peace.

Her peace! Notice another extraordinary power of great verse. Throughout, till now, the play has rushed along, all stress and tumult. Suddenly, the utterance of no more than two lines of poetry is enough to transform the pace, to slow down the play, to slow it down without the slightest jolt, and to set it coming to a close, its action resolved, in quiet and dignity. It is in quiet and dignity that dead Cleopatra lies when Octavius finds her:

> She looks like sleep,
> As she would catch another Antony
> In her strong toil of grace.

The scene provides the perfect ending to this great poetic drama.

I hope I have now succeeded in making you realize the great place that plays in verse occupy in our literature. Of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's masterpiece, I have been able to pick out no more than a few essential features. But I shall have said enough about it if I succeed in sending you to the play itself, there to see for yourselves how, as I have said, the drama sets off the poetic element, and this in turn confers on the drama its fullest value. Both elements are indispensable if we are to be moved by an exhibition of the depths of life. And it is their mutual interaction in poetic drama that I have wanted to impress on you, and an insight into the working of the interaction that I would like you to carry away with you. We shall then be in a position to consider next week poetry alone.

PLAYS CITED

Ben Jonson, *Epicene or The Silent Woman.*
Ben Jonson, *Volpone or The Fox.*
John Galsworthy, *Loyalties.*
J. M. Synge, *Deirdre of the Sorrows.*
Sophocles, *Electra.*
Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts I and II.*
Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta.*
Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedie.*
Thomas Middleton, *The Changeling.*
John Webster, *The Dutchesse of Malfy.*
Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing.*
Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*
Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night.*
Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II.*
Shakespeare, *Richard III.*
Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra.*

VOLUMES OF PLAYS:

The Nonesuch Ben Jonson, ed. Henry Levin.
The *Plays* of John Galsworthy.
The Everyman edition of the *Plays, &c., of J. M. Synge.*
The *Tragedies* of Sophocles, translated *into English* prose by Sir Richard Jebb.
The Temple volumes of Shakespeare's plays separately.

EIGHTH LECTURE

POETRY

IN the summer of 1933 a certain stir was produced among literary people in England by the report of some remarks made at Cambridge by the late A. E. Housman, Latin scholar and English poet, in the course of a lecture which he entitled: *On the Name and Nature of Poetry.* The excitement even spread to the columns of *The Times.* But it was not long-lived. A literary sensation seldom is. That does not mean, however, that the remarks are no longer worth examining. One thing in particular Housman said in his lecture was that the eighteenth century gave England only four poets. These poets he went on to name. They were, he said, William Collins, Christopher Smart, William Cowper, and William Blake. As we shall see in a moment, that is a challenging pronouncement. It might even seem perverse. That is the more reason why it should be thoroughly understood. I propose this evening to take it as, so to speak, my text.

Last week, you remember, we looked into the nature of the power which poetic drama exerts over its auditors and readers. We saw that the secret of the exerting of this power lies in the verse, and yet at the same time that the verse would fail of its effect were it not for the drama. It is because poetic drama is in verse that the audience of its performance is able to experience emotion in face of an exhibition of the depths—as opposed to the surface—of life. But if these depths come to be exhibited, come to be exposed, it is owing to the action. We saw that this holds even of those Elizabethan poetic dramas in which the action strikes us to-day as being needlessly complicated, needlessly violent, and needlessly horrifying. Even in those dramas the power of the verse arises out of the action. In other words, the poetry in poetic drama is supported

by the drama. This evening we are to consider what are the effects achieved by poetry without that support, and how without that support they are achieved.

Here perhaps, rather than anywhere in the course of last week's lecture, is the place to say that to read poetry for profit is to enjoy reading poetry and to appreciate poetry. The appreciation or judgement of poetry is a great part of the enjoyment of poetry. And the best way to fit ourselves to enjoy and to appreciate poetry is to proceed exactly as I have recommended we should proceed for prose. Our business is to extract the maximum effect out of poems, or, rather, to fit ourselves to undergo this maximum effect, and to be able to distinguish how the effect of one poem differs from that of another in quality. And I do not mean merely the effect of single lines, or even of certain passages: I mean the effect of a poem as a whole. To be impressed by single lines or by passages is easy. But to undergo the effect of a poem as a whole, and then to appraise the quality of that effect, is something which calls for training, for effort, and for patience. Yet it is in that that there resides the highest profit to be obtained from reading poetry. Let us, then, be careful not to drop the prey for the shadow. The effect which a poem has upon us as we read and re-read it—that, and not some supposed paraphrase of the poem in prose, or an account in prose of its allegory or of its moral, or a biography of the poet, is our sole concern. Whether or no poetry can do more than prose in the way of painting pictures on walls of the mind that would otherwise remain bare or in the way of influencing our conduct and character—that is a question we may ignore. Certainly poetry moves us more directly, more readily, and also more economically, than prose. Above all, poetry is able on occasion—as we saw last week—to move us in a manner quite beyond the compass of prose. Not necessarily more greatly than some prose, but more deeply, more intensely, than most good prose, and certainly differently. But generalizations about the differences between poetry and

prose cannot be of much help to us. Of course, for profit we want to read both prose and poetry, not trying to find one superior to the other, but enjoying each in its own way. And as with prose, so with poetry: we have to attend to individual pieces of writing; that is to say, to individual poems. As with prose, so with poetry: in what degree any single poem moves us will depend as much on what each of us is, on what each of us is capable of in the way of response, on what poems we have read previously and on how we have read them, as on the quality of the poem itself. No doubt most of us in childhood are spontaneously susceptible to poetry. But as a result of the wrong tactics of most schooling, the artificiality of our education, and the more immediately seductive lure of prose fiction and biography, by the time we are grown up that spontaneous susceptibility has often atrophied. If, as adults, we are to fit ourselves to read poetry for profit, the susceptibility must somehow or other be reacquired. It must be cultivated. Only by reacquiring and cultivating it can we form our judgement and taste, and reach a point where we are able to recognize among writings in verse what is not literature, and are able to recognize also that certain poems, though good, are not the finest poetry. And in order to reacquire and to cultivate our susceptibility to poetry we need to read, to re-read, and to study poems which are acknowledged to be good poems. There is no other course. We shall never acquire, we shall never sharpen, a susceptibility to poetry by reading *about* poetry. We shall never acquire or sharpen it by learning a set of rules to which we would then ask a given poem to conform in order that we might deem it a good poem. The only course is to go to poetry itself—that is to say, to individual poems—and to study the effects they have on us.

Yet if the ability to read poetry for profit is thus one which we can only acquire for ourselves, by our own efforts, nevertheless the acquisition may doubtless be facilitated by means of a few hints. They are what this

lecture is going to try to supply. It cannot do us any harm; on the contrary, it may help us, if, before we begin to read some poems acknowledged to be good, we have some notion of what to look for in them. That is to say, we shall be the better for some notion of wherein lies the essence of poetry. And this is why I propose to consider A. E. Housman's pronouncement that the eighteenth century gave England only four poets—Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake.

I have already said that it is a challenging pronouncement and one that might even seem perverse. Indeed, in several respects it should strike us as being an odd thing to say.

Suppose in the first place we were to ask ourselves how it would have struck Dr. Johnson if he had been able to hear it. We all know that Dr. Johnson lived in the eighteenth century and that he believed himself to be a poet. He is also accepted as a judge of poetry. Those critical estimates of his entitled *Lives of the Poets* have been declared to be not only his most eminent writing, but also of perennial importance. But in addition to possessing some status as a poet and as a judge of poetry, Dr. Johnson looked on Christopher Smart—one of those four who, according to Housman, comprise all the English poets that flourished in the eighteenth century—as among his friends. Dr. Johnson is famous for his kindness to his friends, and he would always have been ready to do a good turn to Kit Smart. But did he consider Smart to be an outstanding poet? Far from it. According to Boswell, Johnson was once asked whether he reckoned Derrick or Smart to be the better poet. "Sir!" he replied, "there is no settling the point of precedency between a louse and a flea." Surely that is the annihilation of Smart! But poets sometimes rise like the Phoenix from their ashes. That has happened to Smart. Yet if to-day he has come to be judged a good poet, it is on the strength of one poem, a poem called *A Song to David;* and this poem in its entirety was made public only in the nineteenth century, long after Dr. Johnson was dead.

We may be confident that whatever he might have thought of it had he been able to read it, he in fact never saw it. So perhaps he may be acquitted of any charge of having misjudged the poetic merit of Smart. We are still left with the question: Was Dr. Johnson himself no poet? For if the Housman pronouncement that the eighteenth century gave England only four poets, none of whom was Dr. Johnson, is right, then evidently Dr. Johnson is no poet.

However, before we try to answer that question or any question like it, let us notice something else. Three of the only four poets in the whole of the eighteenth century Housman will recognize were mad. Collins was a prey to intermittent imbecility. Both Smart and Cowper knew the inside of a madhouse, and it was only while in a madhouse that Smart wrote what was—as in recent years we have come to be assured—genuine poetry. The fourth of Housman's eighteenth-century poets, William Blake, was called a madman by Robert Southey. In itself that would not be very damaging. If Southey spoke of Blake as a madman in contempt, and thought more of his own verse than of some of Blake's, he was a poor judge. Yet coupled with Southey's label is the fact that in his later life, at a time when his head was a fermenting compound of Gnosticism and Druidism plus fragments of Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme, and William Law, and when, furthermore, he was being stirred and excited by the upheaval and promise of the French Revolution, Blake made some queer affirmations. The borderline between sanity and insanity is notoriously vague, and whether or not he ever overstepped it is a nice point which has never been, and now never will be, settled. For that matter, the most satisfying of his poems were all written before this period. But that does not entirely dispose of the question, for madness can be latent as well as active, and the active madness of which the later Blake is accused may have been dormant in him from the beginning, so that we might owe all Blake's best poetry to an incipient madness.

Now, you may remember that in the first of these lectures

I insisted as strongly as I could on the futility, if not, indeed, the harm, of bothering our heads about details of the life of an author and of striving to find in his life some explanation or elucidation of his work, when our sole concern as readers must be with, not an author, but what he wrote and the effect which his writings have on us while and after we read them. Literature, I declared in that first lecture, exists only in individual pieces of writing, and it is in the contents of some of those pieces of writing alone that the profit obtainable from reading is to be sought. Literature must be kept distinct from events in the lives of the men who have produced it. Those lives cannot explain it. Yet here am I telling you that William Collins, Christopher Smart, and William Cowper were all unquestionably mad during part of their lives, and that William Blake may always have had the seed of madness in him. It might seem that I was now guilty of the very digression against the futility and irrelevance of which I was some weeks ago so anxious to warn you. However, the matter is not as bad as that. In mentioning to you the madness of Collins, Smart, and Cowper, and the possible madness of Blake, I am not really dropping into biography. My point, rather, is this: A. E. Housman has assured us that certain writers of verse were the only English poets in the eighteenth century. Three of them turn out to have been mad, and the remaining fourth may have been mad. Did Housman mean to suggest that only madmen produce poetry?

The mere possibility that he did mean to suggest this awakens classical memories. In the *Phaedrus*, one of the Socratic dialogues of Plato, Socrates is made to declare that the lunatic, the lover, and the poet are akin. All three, he says, suffer from some kind of madness. But of course, in the ancient Athens of Plato madness was not viewed as we view it to-day. What Socrates means by madness the dialogue goes on to make clear. Socrates begins by saying that to be in love is, as we still say in English, to be transported. We are all familiar with the

English phrase, " a lover's transports." And we can see what Socrates is after. A man in love is not his normal self. I am told that people fall out of love as frequently as they fall in, and when a man or woman falls out of love the experience appears to be that of having thrown off a kind of daemonic possession. Having spoken of the lover, Socrates turns to the poet. Like the lover, the poet is, he says, as one possessed. In those moments when he composes poetry he is in a condition which Socrates calls " enthusiasm." By " enthusiasm " the ancient Greeks meant the condition of being possessed by a god. We are to understand that, as poets are known sometimes to compose poetry under the impulse of what is called inspiration, in response to some inner urge, so they then write as it were, to dictation: they merely set down what inspiration impels them to set down. That is to say poets are then possessed. But if some poetry has been composed under the impulse of what seemed to the poet to be inspiration, it is also true that a great deal of verse has been composed in, so to speak, cold blood; not as the result of inspiration, but as the result of hard thinking. Socrates is well aware of this. But verse produced in cold blood, verse produced, as he puts it, by art alone is, he holds, invariably inferior to verse produced under the impulse of the divine madness, in a state of enthusiasm and it is, he says, only this latter verse which really deserves the name of poetry. That is the classical theory of poetic composition, of which echoes are found in Dante and as late as the Renaissance. It is what Shakespeare is recalling to his audience when, towards the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus is made to say:

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact: . . .
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

All talk about poetic inspiration springs from some version or other of this theory.

I have told you of it because, if by any chance Housman, in declaring that the only English poets during the eighteenth century were four madmen, meant to suggest that only madmen write real poetry, the theory should help us to decide if he would have been right. In fact, what Socrates is made to say in the *Phaedrus* of Plato regarding the " enthusiasm " of poets compels us to recognize that any suggestion that real poetry is composed only by madmen must be rejected. For although Socrates is made to say that the lunatic, the lover, and the poet are akin, in that all three are in a state of madness or " enthusiasm "—are possessed by some spirit—he is not made to say that the madness or " enthusiasm " of all three is identical—that the same spirit possesses lunatic, lover, or poet indifferently. Indeed, without any reference to the *Phaedrus*, we know, on the one hand, that all madmen do not compose poetry, and, on the other hand, that Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton—four writers of verse to whom we may be sure Housman would not have denied the name of poet—were never insane as were Collins, Smart, and Cowper. So it is not insanity that makes the poet; and when Housman singled out Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake as being the only poets of the eighteenth century, it cannot have been because three of them were mad and the fourth was accused of madness.

But that simply means that we are no nearer seeing what there may be to justify Housman's pronouncement. Before the eighteenth century drew to a close Coleridge had published *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Wordsworth his *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*. Beyond and before that, the eighteenth century was unquestionably the century of Dr. Johnson, regarding whom I have already said that Housman presents us with the question: Was he no poet?—the century of Gray, Robert Burns, Oliver Goldsmith, James Thomson, Charles Wesley, Chatterton, and Robert Southey. Above all,

it was the century of Alexander Pope. Are we to conclude that in the eyes of Housman not one of these was a poet?

Let us take Coleridge and Wordsworth first.

I clos'd my lids and kept them close,
Till the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

That is a representative stanza from *The Ancient Mariner*. Many of us grew familiar with the poem in childhood. We know that in this stanza the Ancient Mariner is in the midst of describing what happened to him on board ship after he had heedlessly shot a following albatross. A kind of curse seemed to have been laid on him and on the ship. Not only is this in itself strange and disturbing, but the speaker is a queer and almost sinister figure. The Wedding Guest to whom he tells his tale he fixes with a glittering eye, and he speaks as one in a trance. When the poem is recited, the stanzas which unfold the tale of weird happenings he has to tell succeed one another in their curiously attractive sing-song measure of mingled two-syllable and three-syllable feet, with a hypnotic effect. Is there anything in all this to lead Housman to deny that the poem is poetry?

Then, so far as a few lines can indicate the character of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, suppose we pick on the following:

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

The passage contains one remarkable line:

The still, sad music of humanity.

Again, we may ask: Is there something about this line to lead Housman to deny to the *Tintern Abbey* the name of poetry?

No. We may be confident that Housman would never have denied that in 1798—the year in which *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and the *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* were published in a joint volume—both Coleridge and Wordsworth were already poets. We may be confident that if neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth figures in Housman's list of eighteenth-century poets, it is not because he considered that in 1798 they did not yet possess the capacity to produce poetry, but because he looked upon them as being poets, not of the eighteenth, but of the nineteenth century. It was after 1800 that both wrote the bulk of their poetry. They are nineteenth-century poets. We may be confident, I say, that Housman would not have denied the name of poetry to either *The Ancient Mariner* or the *Tintern Abbey*, because neither poem is in any way less poetic than, say, this :

> The world, the clustering spheres, He made ;
> The glorious light, the soothing shade,
> Dale, champaign, grove, and *hill* ;
> The multitudinous abyss,
> Where Secrecy remains in bliss,
> And Wisdom hides her skill.

That is one of the eighty-six stanzas making up *A Song to David* which Christopher Smart wrote on the walls of his Bedlam—eighty-six stanzas on the strength of which Housman nominates Smart as one of the only four poets of the eighteenth century. The measure in which *A Song to David* is written is called romance-six or *rime couée*. Each stanza consists of six lines, which are made up of two sets of three, the first two in each set being of four two-syllable feet, called iambi, and the third of three such feet ; and the rhymes are *a–a–b–c–c–b*, the first two lines rhyming together, the third rhyming with the sixth, and the fourth and fifth rhyming together. It is a measure perfectly suited to the subject. Furthermore, the poem as a whole has sweep and force, the force and vivacity of an organ piece by J. S. Bach. It is rich in biblical imagery. But it is not necessarily superior as poetry to *The Ancient*

Mariner or to *Tintern Abbey*; and certainly there are poems later than these by Coleridge or by Wordsworth which any competent judge must recognize to possess at least equality with it. In fact, the poetry of Smart, of Coleridge, and of Wordsworth have an important feature in common. Let us try to see what it is.

There have been numerous attempts to find a form of words that will define poetry. From Milton's definitions —" rhythm in verses " which is probably his and " numerous verse " (verse in which the repeated unit and the way in which the repeat is managed are both beautiful) which is certainly his—to Coleridge's—" the best words in the best order "—the attempts show great variety. Yet none is truly satisfactory. None causes anybody who is familiar with at least some great poetry to feel that what he recognizes in poetry is being accurately summed up. Like painting, poetry is better not defined. It is itself. Nevertheless, it is perhaps permissible to point out that much, though by no means all, poetry is recognizable as being like the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer—as being like an incantation. Hazlitt says of Shakespeare's poetic dramas that in them " every instant teems with fate." The distinguishing quality of the poetry to which I am now referring is that its utterance, if not always fateful, yet seems as if pre-ordained. It is the presence of this quality in such poetry that has led to the talk of poetic inspiration. It is on account of the presence of this quality in much good poetry that Plato in the *Phaedrus* causes Socrates to say that the good poet composes his poetry while in a state of " enthusiasm," while apparently possessed by a daemon. As I have already reminded you this evening, we as readers of poetry are not concerned with investigating the conditions most favourable to its production. But when critics talk of inspired poetry, when the requisite state for the composition of poetry is declared in the *Phaedrus* to be a state of " enthusiasm," it is not how poetry is composed that is being referred to: it is the nature of a certain poetry, perhaps the greater

part of all good poetry. But there seems to be no way of saying what this poetry is except by imagining that a certain state of the poet was necessary to its composition and by then characterizing this state. That is why so many people have spoken of inspiration, why in the *Phaedrus* Socrates is made to speak of "enthusiasm."

Now *The Ancient Mariner* of Coleridge, Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, and Christopher Smart's *A Song to David*, are clearly, each taken as a whole, inspired poetry. To ask that the voice of the seer, that the incantation, should be recognizable in a few lines of any of them is, however, to ask a good deal. Yet I think we can catch it in even fragments of the passages I have already quoted.

> For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
> Lay like a load on my weary eye,
> And the dead were at my feet.

> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.

> The multitudinous abyss,
> Where Secrecy remains in bliss,
> And Wisdom hides her skill.

Some of us may ask: What do the words mean? It is a question often put by people who do not, or who no longer, take to poetry as birds take to flight—instinctively. What on earth, such people are inclined to ask, is "a multitudinous abyss"? And why should Secrecy remain in bliss? What is the meaning of the statement that "Wisdom hides her skill"? And then that phrase, "the still, sad music of humanity"—how can music be still, and if there is still music, how can it be sad, and, anyhow, what is the music of humanity? Let it be granted that, of the passages of poetry I have quoted, only that from *The Ancient Mariner* seems to be straightforward and to be a fully coherent statement. As it happens, in the passage from *The Ancient Mariner* the Ancient Mariner of the poem is in the act of a piece of definite description. What he speaks of may be weird, but there

is nothing abstruse or recondite about it. The hot sky, the flat, blazing sea around the becalmed ship, are too much for his eyes, and he closes them. He closes them also to shut out the sight of the bodies of those of the crew who have mysteriously died. Yet if among the three poets only Coleridge is obviously straightforward and definite, it is also true that Wordsworth likewise is describing something quite definite. He is describing the feelings of a man who is seated one afternoon on the banks of the river Wye and is looking at the scenery. It seemed to Wordsworth—it was his peculiarity as a poet—that nature spoke to man with many voices and that to those who listened quietly to her voices she disclosed clues to the meaning of life and to the strivings of men. This is what he is inviting his readers to join with him in recognizing when he speaks of "the still, sad music of humanity." The music is a music caught only in silence, it is sad, it is the voice of nature telling of human destiny and human longing. And if Wordsworth is thus describing something definite just as much as Coleridge is, so is Christopher Smart. Smart is hymning his praise of King David, or, rather, he is echoing David's praises of God. God, he says, made the world and the firmament—

> The glorious light, the soothing shade,
> Dale, champaign, grove, and hill.

God likewise made all the profound and secret places of the world, and God has His own secret places—"He made darkness His hiding place," the Psalmist says;

> Where Secrecy remains in bliss,
> And Wisdom hides her skill.

In those secret places there is bliss, and in them wisdom dissembles its skill. When we come to think of it, that is, after all, the essence of wisdom, to have skill; but the skill of wisdom is never blatant, never obtrusive.

Thus a literal or prose meaning can be read into each of the passages. Each passage can be found to mean something all right. But really that literal or prose

meaning does not matter. We are not to read poetry for information or in order to grasp the successive steps in an argument. A poetic description may be such as to enable its readers to recognize the place or person described, but that is never why the description has been given the form of poetry. The object of poetry is to act upon our sensibility and to excite feelings in us by means of the associations which its language leads us to form. Every line of a good poem may have half a dozen "meanings" of this kind, none of which the reader clearly apprehends, but some or all of which together excite in him feeling or emotion. And the quality of this feeling or emotion is alone what matters. The business of much poetry is, in short, to be suggestive, not to be informative. The metre and the rhythm of its language minister powerfully to this suggestion which poetry makes to us. Hence, while we need to read prose in a state of alertness to grasp the meaning, we need to read poetry in a passive state, in a state that enables us to *undergo* the suggestion. In reading poetry we want to let the words act upon us, so that the successive statements of which a poem is made up may elicit from us a sequence and combination of emotional responses; and, as I cannot too strongly insist or too often repeat, it is the quality of these responses which establishes the value of a poem.

There is a kind of human mind which it would be unfair to call the military mind, for it is not common to all soldiers and it is far from being unknown among civilians. It is a mind of dull sensibility and limited imagination. If this mind likes any verse at all, it expects the verse to be one of two sorts. Either plain narrative with a lilt to it as emphatic as a marching tune, something like this:

> In the bright October morning
> Savoy's duke had left his bride;
> From the Castle, past the drawbridge,
> Flow'd the hunters' merry tide.

Or else verse of which it has been well said that it has

"no inside," verse that is all surface catchwords and glitter, say:

> Safe in the magic of my woods
> I lay, and watched the dying light,
> Faint in the pale high solitudes,
> And washed with rain and veiled by night.

The quality of the feeling produced in a reader by such verse is nil, or at most the feeling is superficial, second-rate. And yet there is no disputing that in this verse lies the germ of poetry: the verse is "numerous verse" in the sense that it has number, a regular beat, and that it does stir the reader. Verse which is the real thing, which is fully poetic, may move us more deeply and enduringly, provided we overcome our first aversion to vagueness or ambiguity of meaning, but it moves us in the same way. There can therefore be no obstacle except in ourselves to our going on from enjoyment of the verse of jaunty narrative or the verse of mere surface suggestion to enjoyment of verse which is fully poetic. And if we succeed in acquiring the ability to have this latter enjoyment, there can be no doubt we shall find it to be far greater.

Then, once we have become a little familiar with verse which is fully poetic, or let us say simply, with poetry, and once poetry has ceased to be strange and rather forbidding to us, we may, if we like, go on to take some real poem that we have enjoyed and to analyse the secret of the power which it has exerted over us; to analyse, that is to say, the quality of our enjoyment, of the feelings or emotion which the poem has excited in us as we were reading it. By doing this repeatedly we may acquire the ability to judge poetry; in other words, to appreciate poetry. We shall find that the appreciation of poetry is, as I said earlier this evening, a further enjoyment of poetry; and, more than that, that the appreciation of poetry, the discriminating between the quality of the emotion excited by different poems, is the road to our experiencing an immediate enjoyment of the highest poetry.

If we follow this course and acquire the ability to appreciate poetry, we shall notice that the poetry which moves us both immediately and profoundly is poetry which sounds like the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer, poetry which is as an incantation, poetry such as *The Ancient Mariner* of Coleridge, the *Tintern Abbey* of Wordsworth, or Christopher Smart's *A Song to David.* There we have at least one main reason why A. E. Housman declared one of the poets of the eighteenth century to be Smart. It is also at least one main reason why Housman picked out William Collins.

> And many a nymph who wreathes her brow with sedge,
> And sheds the freshening dew, and, lovelier still,
> The pensive pleasures sweet,
> Prepare thy shadowy car :
>
> Then lead, calm votaress, where some sheety lake
> Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
> Or upland fallows grey
> Reflect its last cool gleam.

That is from *Ode to Evening* by Collins. The passage may be instructively compared with one out of a famous poem by a contemporary of his.

> Can storied urn or animated bust
> Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
> Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
> Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of death?

We all of us recognize that. It is a stanza of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, a poem which attained a tremendous circulation upon its publication and which has gone on being read and admired ever since. There can be hardly a boy or girl who has not been made to learn it by heart. This long popularity, and indeed fame, cannot be ignored. It would be silly, to say the least, to condemn out of hand a poem that has pleased countless thousands for generations. If any one of us were to read the poem for the first time and remain quite unaffected by it, he would be wiser, rather than merely to dismiss it, to try to ascertain why and how it

has appealed to so many other people. Yet A. E. Housman's pronouncement that the eighteenth century gave the world only four English poets leaves his verdict on Gray in no doubt. In the eyes of Housman, Gray is not a poet. We may well ask ourselves why. Let us try to discover.

When we re-read the stanza from the *Elegy* which I have quoted:

> Can storied urn or animated bust
> Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
> Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
> Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of death?

we see that it is not altogether unlike that stanza of another writer of verse which I read to you just now:

> Safe in the magic of my woods
> I lay, and watched the dying light,
> Faint in the pale high solitudes,
> And washed with rain and veiled by night.

The theme, the mood, differ totally. Gray's stanza is infinitely more *highly* wrought. And yet the evocative power of the two stanzas is curiously similar. You remember how it is told of General Wolfe, that on the night when his army was to scale the Heights of Abraham, the eve of his own soldierly death, he was sitting in a boat on the quiet, dark waters of the St. Lawrence, and he recited aloud a part of Gray's *Elegy*, declaring he would rather have written that poem than be the victor in a great battle. There is, I am assured, hardly a line of the *Elegy* without its classical parallel. These echoes of Greek and Latin poetry did much, we may suppose, to recommend the *Elegy* to cultivated readers of General Wolfe's day, for the classics were then the familiar possession of the whole reading public. But it was not only those echoes, we may be sure, that made Wolfe admire the *Elegy* so much. Wolfe was unquestionably a very gallant soldier.

> Wolfe, where'er he fought,
> Put so much of his heart into his act,
> That his example had a magnet's force,
> And all were swift to follow whom all loved.

But we need not credit him with more than the dull sensibility and limited imagination which are associated—I do not doubt, most unfairly—with the military mind. And however numerous the *Elegy's* parallels with the classics may be, the famous poem is at the same time a compound of commonplaces. This, as much as the classical-echoes, may have the credit, we can assume, of endearing it to General Wolfe, and this also will largely account for its popularity both at the time it was published and ever since. Not only generals, but many other people like to read commonplaces dressed in graceful and sonorous words. Such people are, as I have said, dull in sensibility and limited in imagination. They do not mind how often a commonplace is repeated. After they have read that to set up a memorial urn will not revive a corpse, they welcome going on to read that neither will setting up a bust. And even then they are not satiated. They are glad—we may even imagine them almost eager—to go on to read that posthumous honours never brought a dead man back to life ; nor does it cloy them thereupon to find the statement repeated, with the mere substitution of " flattery " for " honour." A faithful summary of the *Elegy* must show the whole of it to be made up of such almost fatuous platitudes. Towards the end are some stanzas which struck Dr. Johnson, who did not relish Gray's verse in general, as displaying originality.

> Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect
> Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
> With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
> Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

That is the first of the stanzas. Those which follow say that we are never resigned to die without a backward glance at life and require to take leave of the world " on some fond breast." Whether original or not, the stanzas do not differ markedly from the rest of the poem in their power of moving a reader.

Of course it is not in solely being a compound of commonplaces that the *Elegy* has won its enduring place

in English literature. We know that Gray, before issuing it to the world, kept it by him for a long time, and that during this time he frequently revised and polished it. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that verse is ever the worse for having such care lavished upon it. In spite of theories that a poet writes in a frenzy, as one possessed, a poem that has been worked over and improved in many a detail will often strike the reader as inspired poetry when one left as first written will not. As regards the *Elegy*, it has an exceptional smoothness of diction; it has a felicity of expression which facilitates the retention of its lines in our memories. There is every evidence that Gray revised and polished it to its entire benefit. Indeed, given what he wished to do in it, we need not dispute that he succeeded supremely well. Compared with the stanza I have already quoted and beginning:

Safe in the magic of my woods,

there is not a line in the *Elegy* which is not a triumph. If, as I said, the germ of all poetry lies in that stanza, it is hard to see how poetry in full leaf does not burst out of every part of the *Elegy*. And yet, remember, A. E. Housman denies to Gray the name of poet. Collins, Housman says, is a poet, but Gray is not. Housman, that is, champions Collins against Gray. In that, he is but the latest in a line of critics; and one of these, Swinburne, a very good critic, wrote: "The Muse gave birth to Collins, she did but give suck to Gray." We have still not yet found in what it is the alleged superiority of Collins consists.

But really the explanation of the alleged superiority has been confronting us all the time. The explanation lies in something I said before I ever quoted Collins or Gray. Admirable in its way the *Elegy* may be, felicitous, chiselled, memorable. Yet it contains nothing having the ring and the power of expressions and phrases in the *Ode to Evening* of Collins; nothing equivalent to:

. . . many a nymph who wreathes her brow with sedge,
And sheds the freshening dew,

nothing equivalent to "pensive pleasures sweet," to "shadowy car" or "last cool gleam"; no visual images as sharp and clear and moving as "sheety" in the expression "sheety lake"; nothing as deeply effective as the assonance of "sheety" and "heath." In short, quite apart from its being a compound of commonplaces, the *Elegy* is what Socrates is made to call in the *Phaedrus* "poetry made by art." But the *Ode to Evening* is poetry written in a state of "enthusiasm." Matthew Arnold said of Gray that he never spoke out. That is another way of indicating that Gray's poetry does not sound, it does not affect us, as if it were the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer. It never simulates an incantation. But the poetry of Collins does; and that is why Housman numbers Collins among the poets of the eighteenth century.

And yet—and yet we must not allow Housman, or Swinburne, or indeed any one, to hold back from us the fact that, as I have already said, the germ, if no more, of all true poetry is in such poems as Gray's *Elegy*. Housman may refuse to call the *Elegy* poetry. Swinburne may deny that the Muse was more than foster-mother to Gray. *It* remains that the *Elegy*, to the extent it moves its readers at all, moves them as does the *Ode to Evening* of Collins. It fails to move them so deeply, no doubt; but it moves them in the same way, by the same means. It moves them, that is to say, by the power of words in a certain order and by the power of metre and rhythm. Are we, in spite of that, to agree with Housman that it is not poetry?

Probably the best way to answer this question is to turn from Gray to one whose name has perhaps even greater renown in eighteenth-century poetry. I mean, of course, Alexander Pope. He too is excluded from Housman's list of eighteenth-century poets. And he is excluded on very much the same grounds. For of Pope it is tempting to say that, like Gray, he composed verse—as the *Phaedrus* has it—by art alone. At all events he certainly resembled Gray in his methods. As Gray kept the *Elegy* by him for a long time after it had been

first written and laboured scrupulously and diligently to polish and to improve it, so Pope did his work. Moreover, it is open to any one to watch Pope in the act, so to speak, of polishing and improving. It is only necessary to turn to that one of Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* devoted to Pope. Johnson examined the original manuscript of Pope's version of the *Iliad*, and reproduces first the early and then the final forms of a number of quatrains and single lines. Sometimes he quotes an intermediate rendering as well. I will give you an example. The Greek of course is not in question.

> The stern Pelides' rage, O Goddess, sing,
> Of all the woes of Greece the fatal spring,
> That strew'd with warriors dead the Phrygian plain,
> And peopled the dark shades with heroes slain.

The lines are the beginning of the first book. They say what they have to say, you will agree, very well. Yet Pope found he could do better. Meditated upon and then emended, the lines became :

> The stern Pelides' *wrath*, O Goddess, sing,
> Of all the *Grecian* woes, the fatal spring,
> That strew'd with *heroes* dead the Phrygian plain
> And *filled* the *shady hell* with *chiefs untimely* slain.

" Rage " is now " wrath." " Of Greece " has had substituted for it " Grecian." The word " heroes " has gone up a line. The " dark shades " have become the " shady hell." No doubt is possible that there has been great improvement. Even this, however, Pope did not allow to be final. There were still further revisions ; and, as ultimately published, the lines read as follows :

> The wrath of *Peleus*' son, the direful spring
> Of all the Grecian woes, O Goddess, sing ;
> That *wrath* which *hurl'd* to *Pluto's gloomy reign*
> The souls of *mighty* chiefs untimely slain.

There is no need to remark that this final and published rendering is far and away the best. That is obvious. The words " slain chiefs," redundant on top of " dead warriors " or " dead heroes," have been dropped. Added

force is obtained from the iteration of the word "wrath." A happy assonance has been introduced—"mighty" and "untimely." And of course, "The wrath of Peleus' son" is a great advance on "The stern Pelides' wrath," and the placing of the words "O Goddess, sing" in the second line gets rid of an inversion which hindered the general effect. In short, there is exhibited in the final text what Matthew Arnold well calls Pope's prodigious talent.

Dr. Johnson shows us Pope achieving similar improvements in single lines.

Since first Atrides and Achilles strove

became

Since *great* Achilles and Atrides strove.

Declare, o Goddess, what offended Power

became

Declare, o *Muse*, in what *ill-fated hour*.

For Chryses sought by presents to regain

became

For Chryses sought with *costly gifts* to gain

Presents the sceptre, and the laurel crown

became

Extends the sceptre, and the laurel crown.

And fear the God that deals his darts around

was first altered to

And fear *avenging Phoebus, son of Jove;*

and it finally became

And *dread* avenging Phoebus, son of Jove.

Each alteration of these lines is indisputably an emendation. The insertion of the word "great" adds incomparably to the force of the line about Achilles and Atrides, and the inversion of those names is a further gain. "Muse" is better than "goddess" in the context: sharper and stronger; and in the same line "ill-fated hour" is better than "offended Power." No one could fail to prefer "costly gifts to gain" to "presents to regain." "*Extends* the sceptre" is better sounding and more effective than "presents." "Dread" is a marked improvement on

"fear"; and "avenging Phoebus, son of Jove" is far superior to "the God that deals his darts around."

The alterations thus testify to the fruitfulness of Pope's immense industry. But I have not extracted from Dr. Johnson the different versions of the lines in order to show you how lines of verse yield to revision, or in order to show you that Pope was immensely industrious. As readers of his verse, his industry is no concern of ours. All that matters to us is the result. And as we have seen, revision was all to the benefit of the final result which Pope has given us. But the reason I have quoted the successive forms which he gave to various lines, and have shown how on occasion he transposed lines before he was satisfied with their position, is that we might see how at no stage in the production of his *Iliad* was his verse like the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer. The semblance of an incantation is wholly absent.

Please notice that I am saying nothing against a poet's revision and alteration of his verse. Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare that he never blotted out a line. But that is not why Shakespeare is our greatest poet. In particular, that a poem is pulled about and in places recast before it is submitted to the public does nothing to prevent it from affecting us when we read it as if it were an incantation. But if poetry is to simulate an incantation, is to sound like the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer, either the incantatory element must spring out of the poet's pen at the first writing or it must somehow be injected into the poem in the course of revision. But, as I say, the evidence of the successive forms given to various lines is that the incantatory element was not present in the first draft of Pope's *Iliad*, nor did he get that element in as a result of revision. We have seen that every change he made was an improvement. It remains that all the improvements are verbal improvements. Like the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, the *Iliad* of Pope is poetry made by art, not poetry produced in a state of "enthusiasm." The final result is highly wrought and

exquisitely polished. But the last form exactly like the first form of various lines has no underlying emotional power; its beauties and their effect are purely verbal.

The passage I quoted from the *Ode to Evening* of William Collins is rich and heavy with suggestion. We can see the pagan nymphs wreathing their brows with sedge. The one word "sheety" is evocative of the glassy sheen on the placid surface of the lake. Our feelings are stirred by the vague mystery of "lone heath" and "shadowy car." "Time-hallow'd pile" is no longer to-day a very happy phrase. But "upland fallows grey," with its combination of sweet sound and verbal thrift, marks a triumphal recovery, and this is consolidated and reaffirmed by "last cool gleam." In the lines I have quoted from Pope's *Iliad*, on the other hand, we are not made to see anything or to smell anything. There is no strong power of suggestion, no atmosphere of vague mystery. The final lines may be verbally beautiful, and their verbal beauty may stir us. We may marvel at Pope's exquisite verbal skill. But that is all there is to marvel at.

It might be supposed that Pope in his *Iliad* was hampered to some extent by the aim to produce something of a translation. But the truth is that such verbal poetry is the poetry that Pope wished to write. Even when the effort to reproduce from another language cannot have been constricting his Muse, it is still poetry "made by art alone" that he composes. For instance:

> True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
> As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
> 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
> The sound must seem an echo of the sense.
> Soft is the strain when zephyr gently blows,
> And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
> But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
> The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
> When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
> The line too labours, and the words move slow:
> Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
> Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.

Or again :

> Thou, mean deserter of thy brother's blood !
> See on these ruby lips the trembling breath,
> These cheeks now fading at the blast of Death :
> Cold is that breast which warm'd the world before,
> And those love-darting eyes must roll no more.

There, in the *Essay on Criticism* and in the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, Pope should certainly be writing as he pleases. No necessity to conform to a foreign original constricts him. Yet neither passage will pass for poetry written in a state of " enthusiasm," in a frenzy of daemonic possession. Every word seems, on the contrary, to have been carefully weighed and its position carefully calculated. Art, great art, exquisite art, is there in abundance ; but of incantation there is not a trace. Thus it is that Pope, like Gray, is excluded by Housman from the select company of eighteenth-century true poets. Clearly, for Housman, only poetry that seems to have been composed in a state of " enthusiasm," only poetry that has upon its reader the suggestive, disturbing, and semi-hypnotic effect of an incantation, deserves to be called poetry.

We have seen that such was the poetry written by William Collins and by Christopher Smart. It is also the poetry of William Cowper. Of Pope, Cowper wrote that he

> Made poetry a mere mechanic art
> And every warbler has his time by heart.

Into the justice of the verdict let us not enter for the moment. Cowper meant that Pope's verse was so impeccable that it could easily be mimicked. Yet if it is easy to produce such an imitation of Pope's heroic couplet, it is equally easy to imitate Cowper's " time " in :

> Toll for the Brave !
> The brave that are no more !
> All sunk beneath the wave
> Fast by their native shore !

Nevertheless, " mechanic " is seldom the word that rises to our lips as we read any poetry of Cowper's. Certainly

his lines mostly have another music than Pope's, and upon us when reading them another effect. Cowper often adopted the formality of the preceding century, but that does not lessen the sweetness and simplicity of what he says. Whenever he is describing nature his words seem as if artlessly rich in underlying suggestion. Hear him speak of

> Rills that slip
> Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall
> Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
> In matted grass, that with a livelier green
> Betrays the secret of their silent course.

How sweet and suggestive, at the same time as starkly vivid, are the two last lines! Again:

> There is in souls a sympathy with sounds;
> And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleased
> With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave;
> Some chord in unison with what we hear
> Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.
> How soft the music of those village bells
> Falling at intervals upon the ear
> In cadence sweet.

Although these lines are among those most frequently quoted from Cowper's long poem, *The Task*, I do not say that they are perfect. It is evident that the words "souls," "mind," and "heart" are synonyms, applying all three to a same entity. It may look as if the changes had been rung with them merely in order to avoid any sound of repetition; but perhaps the poet is using each name in turn effectively to rouse in his readers a specific emotion. And, perfect or imperfect, the lines are certainly in strong contrast to any of Pope's, and in particular to those of Pope's I last quoted:

> Thou, mean deserter of thy brother's blood!
> See on these ruby lips the trembling breath,
> These cheeks now fading at the blast of Death:
> Cold is that breast which warm'd the world before,
> And those love-darting eyes must roll no more.

Cowper seeks to move the reader by calling up a real experience.

> How soft the music of those village bells!

"*Those* bells." Hark! the bells are ringing now. And listen; how softly they sound! But when Pope says:

> See on these ruby lips the trembling breath,

we are not brought into the presence of some unique dying woman; we are merely invited to imagine the stock death scene: failing breath, paling cheeks, glazed eyes, and the approaching pause of the heart-beat. That, briefly, is where the difference lies between the poetry that is as an incantation and the poetry which, if poetry, excites only by its wording.

We can now answer the question which I raised at the beginning of this lecture: Was Dr. Johnson, as Housman implies, no poet? In the year 1738 Johnson brought out a poem called *London*, and on the same day Pope published a poem also. The first impression of the public was that *London* was the better of the two. But if we to-day read any quantity of the poetry of Pope and of the poetry of Johnson, we cannot fail to see that they both wrote the same kind of poetry—verbal poetry—and that the only difference between them is that Pope is Johnson's consummate superior. *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, which Johnson published in 1749, seemed to his contemporaries a finer work than his *London*. Here is a passage from its conclusion:

> Where then shall hope and fear their objects find?
> Shall dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
> Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
> Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
> Shall no dislike alarm, *no wishes rise*,
> No cries attempt the mercy of the skies?
> Inquirer, cease; petitions yet remain,
> Which Heav'n may hear, nor deem Religion vain.
> Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
> But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.

Set beside this a passage from Pope's *Essay on Man* having a not entirely unconnected theme:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
> The proper study of mankind is man.
> Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise, and rudely great:

With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

Dr. Johnson is homiletic and intensely earnest, but it is little more than his earnestness that gives his verse life. Pope's lines live of themselves; the choice of words is unerring, and their aptness fills the reader with a sequence of satisfactions. But Pope is not at all abashed by the strangely mixed character of man; no intense earnestness on his part, but a kind of taunting delight—taunting delight at finding that at the same time as man is the riddle and glory of the world, he should also be the jest. In displaying a disparate mastery over words and in reflecting a divergence of attitude lies the whole difference between the verse of Pope and the verse of Johnson. Apart from this, the verse of both *is* one in kind. It is what I have been calling verbal poetry. Johnson no more than Pope, and Pope no more than Johnson, could inform verse with what moves us as *heaped-up anguish* and despair in that last poem which Cowper a year before his death was led to write as a result of having read of a sailor being swept overboard in mid-Atlantic and drowned.

Misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.
No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd *in* deeper *gulphs* than he.

And when we pass from the poetry of Johnson and Pope, or even from that of Gray, to the work of the last of Housman's only poets of the eighteenth century, to the work of William Blake, it is to pass, as it were, into another world. Everybody knows Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, in which the music of the words and the eloquence of the fancy are blended with perfect simplicity. There is, for instance, *The Chimney Sweeper :*

> And that very night,
> As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight !—
> That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
> Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.
>
> And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
> And he open'd the coffins and set them all free ;
> Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
> And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.
>
> Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
> They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind ;
> And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
> He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

That is already very far away from the poetry of Gray, Johnson, or Pope. But Blake can take us still farther. *The Chimney Sweeper* may be summed up as the Blake of vision and joy. There is also the prophetic and apocalyptic Blake.

> Solemn heave the Atlantic waves between the gloomy nations,
> Swelling, belching from its deeps red clouds and raging fires.
> Albion is sick ! America faints ! Enrag'd the Zenith grew.
> As human blood shooting its veins all round the orbèd heaven,
> Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood,
> And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea—
> Intense ! naked ! a Human fire, fierce glowing, as the wedge
> Of iron heated in the furnace ; his terrible limbs were fire,
> With myriads of cloudy terrors, banners dark, and towers
> Surrounded : heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere.

That is not the Blake of the final period, compounded of Gnosticism and Druidism, plus fragments of Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme, and William Law. It is the still lucid Blake. It is Blake at the summit of his powers.

It is a passage from the short poem entitled *America, a Prophecy*, and written in 1793, the first year of what we are assured was the happiest and most crowded period of Blake's life. The poem makes use of the American War of Independence in order to symbolize the development of the life of man. It is a poem of lurid beauty, which unmistakably affects its readers as the voice of a seer, as an incantation, as the report of a vision seen in trance. It is because there were both Blakes, the Blake of vision and joy in the *Songs of Experience*, and also this prophetic and apocalyptic Blake, that Blake is admitted to complete the list of Housman's only poets of the eighteenth century.

I am afraid I have provided only fleeting glimpses of the verse of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Smart, Collins, Gray, Cowper, Pope, Johnson, and Blake. I have not said a word about that of Goldsmith, Burns, James Thomson, Charles Wesley, Chatterton, or Robert Southey. Yet by now I have succeeded, I hope, in making clear what Housman had in mind when he declared that the only eighteenth-century poets were Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake. He meant to indicate that in his eyes only the poetry which works by suggestion, only the poetry which moves its readers with its undertones, only the poetry that is as the utterance of a seer, only the poetry that seems to have been composed in a state of "enthusiasm"—only that poetry is really poetry. It remains to say that, as people wishing to read for profit, we must not agree with him.

In an earlier lecture I spoke of the importance for English criticism of Matthew Arnold. Regarding the effect which poetry has on its readers, Arnold once made a very interesting statement. Poetry, he said, has the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us who read it "a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and our own relations with them." Whether or not the intimacy is real remains, as Arnold himself went on to remark, neither here nor there. The sign that what we

read is poetry is that we are given this feeling of intimacy. As a description of the effect which poetry has on its readers, this, I submit, is eminently satisfying. But, as now we cannot fail to notice, it is the description of only one effect of poetry, or, rather, perhaps, of the effect of only one kind of poetry. Arnold, in seeking to express the nature of the power of poetry, neglected to add that if we insist on obtaining from poetry his feeling of intimacy with things, then among all the poetry of the eighteenth century we must confine our reading, as Housman would have us do, to that of Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake. We must forgo reading the verse of that eighteenth-century poet, Pope. And as with the poetry of the eighteenth, so with that of the adjacent centuries. We must forgo reading a large part of the verse of the great seventeenth-century poet, Dryden, of whom Pope said that he had learned from him all that he knew. We must not only forgo reading such verse of Arnold's as I have already quoted :

> In the bright October morning
> Savoy's duke had left his bride ;
> From the Castle, past the drawbridge,
> Flow'd the hunters' merry tide.

We must also forgo reading nearly everything written by that remarkable nineteenth-century poet, Byron, whose immense admiration for Pope is the sign of the closeness of their poetic kinship.

Dryden, Pope, Byron—they are the leading exponents of a notion of poetry which is not that of Collins, Smart, Cowper, or Blake, of Coleridge or Wordsworth, of Swinburne or Housman. It is not, although we cannot pause to see how, the notion of poetry of Robert Burns, whom Housman can only omit from among English poets of the eighteenth century because he was a Scot. And yet there is really no valid reason why we should deny to the verse of Dryden, Pope, and Byron the quality of true poetry. Admittedly, this verse affects us differently from the verse preferred by Housman, but it affects us—and

this I must beg you to realize—by exactly the same means. It affects us, that is to say, exactly as does the verse of Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake, through the power acquired by words in a certain order, and it affects us exactly as does the verse of Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake, through the power exerted by metre and by rhythm. The effect is different, vastly different; but the means is the same.

How can we agree with Cowper that even Pope's excellence made his "poetry a mere mechanic art" when we are falling under the spell of Pope's marvellous craft in words? Pope writes most often in heroic couplets. They are neat and lucid. Every line is restricted to a fixed number of syllables and a fixed fall of stresses. The heroic measure seems foredoomed to monotony. But so consummate is Pope's mastery of his language that in his hands monotony is miraculously avoided. His poems in the heroic measure are most easy to read, and after we have read on and on our pleasure is as strong and fresh as when we began. In narrative especially, he frequently rises to an almost breath-taking felicity, as, for instance, in that part of *The Rape of the Lock*, where the scissors are about to snip off the lock while the young victim is in all innocence bending over a tea-urn:

> He takes the gift with *rev'rence*, and extends
> The little engine on his fingers' ends;
> This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
> As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
> *Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,*
> A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
> And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear;
> Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The meeting points the *sacred* hair dissever
> From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!

Could any narration fit the narrative more exquisitely? The words "reverence" and "sacred" have an irony that make the passage additionally delightful; and there is the suspicion of a tinge of the mock heroic in "fragrant

steams" as well. In this passage, then, the words have a power of suggestion of their own, and this ensures that *The Rape of the Lock*, as unmistakably as any verse by Collins, Smart, Cowper, or Blake, is poetry.

And, in passing, let us notice another point. Those critics who would have it that only the verse which is as the voice of a seer, which is as an incantation, is poetry, overlook the fact that in every poem of any length—*The Task* of William Cowper, for example—there must be flats between the heights. How to succeed in covering these flats is one of the major problems of the poet. But at least there is no doubt that he is then wisest and happiest in being prosaic. Hence even "inspired" poetry cannot be inspired all the time. And by the side of these prosaic stretches in so-called inspired poems much verse by Dryden, Pope, or Byron, will be found highly poetic.

The truth is that we cannot agree with Housman. The truth is that we have to recognize the existence of two kinds of poetry—the poetry which is as an incantation and fills us with eddying feelings, feelings that reach out and out from a centre, which centre is the stimulus given by a piece of such poetry; and the poetry which moves us more by the aptness of its language and the enchantment of its thought. In reading for profit, there can be no cause to neglect either kind.

If that conclusion were the sole fruit of this lecture, the lecture would still, I think, have been worth while. But, as it happens, we have, in the course of reaching the conclusion, learned other things as well. We set out, you remember, to consider what are the effects achieved by poetry when it lacks the support of drama, and we have been brought finally to recognize that the effects are of two main kinds in correspondence with the two main kinds of poetry. And we have seen also—let me repeat—that the object of poetry is always to act on our sensibility and to excite feelings in us by means of the associations which its language leads us to form. Hence, as I have said and I think it well now to repeat, while prose we

need to read in a state of alertness to grasp the meaning, poetry we need to read in a passive state, in a state, that is to say, that enables us to *undergo* its emotional effect. In reading poetry we want to allow the words to act upon us, so that the successive statements of which a poem is made up may elicit from us a sequence and combination of emotional responses; and, once more, it is the quality of these responses which establishes the value of a poem. Again, we have seen that the appreciation of poetry is a large part of the enjoyment of poetry, and that to appreciate a poem is to analyse the quality of our enjoyment, the quality of those emotional responses of which I have just spoken. To do this is to go about acquiring the ability to judge poetry, for to appreciate poetry is to judge it. And to judge poems, to discriminate between the quality of the emotion excited in us by different poems, is to follow the road along which we shall be able to experience immediate enjoyment of the highest poetry.

Once we understand, in the first place, how we should read poetry; once we understand, in the second place, in what the appreciation of poetry consists; and once we recognize, in the third place, that there are two main kinds of poetry and understand the nature of each, we are ready to take up the reading of poetry for profit.

POEMS CITED

S. T. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*
W. Wordsworth, *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.*
Christopher Smart, *A Song to David.*
Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.*
Matthew Arnold, *The Church of Brou.*
Rupert Brooke, *The Voice.*
William Collins, *Ode to Evening.*
Alexander Pope, *Iliad.*
Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism.*

Alexander Pope, *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady.*
Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man.*
Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock.*
William Cowper, *The Royal George.*
William Cowper, *The Task.*
William Cowper, *The Castaway.*
Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes.*
William Blake, *The Chimney Sweeper.*
William Blake, *America : a Prophecy.*

NINTH LECTURE

THE "NEW" POETRY

By the "new" poetry I intend the more important poetry that has appeared during the last thirty to thirty-five years. It is simply the "new" poetry of our time, and it can be new for our time only. There has constantly been "new" poetry in the past, and gradually it has ceased to be new. No art can go on being practised and stand still. Perhaps I have said this before. If so, it bears repeating. The contribution of each artist to his art is novelty, for no artist can follow completely in the steps of another. When the novelty succeeds—that is to say, when it satisfies the spectator or auditor, and when also it is adopted by other artists—incorporated by them into tradition—the particular artist who introduces the novelty into the practice of his art is important. When the novelty fails to succeed in this fashion, he is not. If we cast our glance backward and survey the long and varied course taken by English poetry through the centuries, we see that there has frequently been "new" poetry, and that successful novelty in poetry has never constituted a breach with the past. The past is not disregarded by the "new" poet. He assimilates it at the same time as he extends it. He both absorbs tradition and forms tradition.

The later work of a same poet may be "new" poetry when placed beside his earlier work; for it has been within the power of certain poets to write better and better verse as they grew mature. Of this, the blank verse of Shakespeare affords a striking example.

> Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring;
> Your tributary drops belong to woe,
> Which you, mistaking, offer up to joy.
> My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;
> And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:
> All this is comfort; wherefore weep I, then?

That is Juliet soliloquizing in *Romeo and Juliet.*

> Not for Bohemia, nor the pomp that may
> Be thereat glean'd, for all the sun sees, or
> The close earth wombs, or the profound seas hide
> In unknown fathoms, will I break my oath
> To this my fair belov'd : therefore I pray you,
> As you have ever been my father's honour'd friend,
> When he shall miss me—as in faith I mean not
> To see him any more—cast your good counsels
> Upon his passion : let myself and fortune
> Tug for the time to come.

That is Florizel to Camillo in *The Winter's Tale.* Our ear will tell us that Florizel is speaking better poetry than Juliet. In the early blank verse of Shakespeare, although there is already a certain running over of the sense, the line is cast in an inflexible mould. In the blank verse of his poetic maturity, the mould has been discarded. Easily and without constriction, the lines are broken up ; and the five-foot beat, instead of forming a mould, is now no more than a backbone. It is always there, but unobtrusively. Pauses inside lines and running on from one line to another are so engineered as to bestow on the verse the melodic fluency of an expression of natural feeling ; in being brought closer to everyday speech it is deprived of none of its own music. This effect of fluency is heightened by means of devices such as tri-syllabic substitution—the occasional use of three syllables where the metre requires only two—and weak endings—" therefore I pray you " is one in the second of the passages I have read—endings having, that is to say, an additional unaccented syllable.

It is from the introduction of blank verse into English from Latin in the sixteenth century—a great novelty at the time—that the subsequent chief novelties in the writing of English verse arose. They were the substitution of the heroic couplet for blank verse in the seventeenth century and then the general adoption of rhythms and metres more emotionally suggestive at the beginning of the nineteenth. Last week, you remember, we saw how

Pope brought the heroic couplet to the topmost pitch of attainable perfection. It was Shakespeare who had earlier achieved perfection in blank verse. He used blank verse for poetic drama. Milton, who died fifty-eight years later than Shakespeare, transferred blank verse back to the poetry which has to do without the support of drama. He gave to the mass of the blank verse paragraph an unparalleled majesty; and it cannot be said that in his hands the blank verse line was in any sense debased. But John Fletcher the dramatist, who survived Shakespeare by only nine years, extended Shakespeare's innovations in blank verse to a point at which they became weaknesses. He made blank verse thoroughly conversational by adding extra syllables to its line, and at the same time he tended to empty the line of its poetic content. One great poet, John Donne, and several lesser poets, whether they were writing in blank verse or making rhyme, were even less respectful of strict metre. In blank verse especially, the lesser poets let the lines sag, so that the lines sound either rough or slovenly. A reaction became inevitable, and its success is attributed by Dryden to Edmund Waller, Milton's contemporary. It was Waller who set the fashion of putting verse into heroic couplets.

> The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decay'd,
> Lets in new light through chinks that Time has made.
> Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,
> As they draw near to their eternal home.

Of course, the use of a rhyming couplet with ten syllables in each line and its clearly marked beats was not new. The novelty achieved by Waller was to make the literate world familiar with this measure, and to bring it into fashion with poets. In being made smooth and terse poetry grew easy to read, but it ran the risk of monotony. Also, it lost its power of suggestion. It became matter of fact. Its undertones were silenced. But the public taste of the time did not seem to miss these undertones. Ordinary speech, the conversation of every day, was

growing formal and even stilted. It was this which assisted such poetry into favour. Verbal poetry I called it last week. It might also be called sophisticated poetry. This came to be the accepted poetry in the second half of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth. Dryden wrote hundreds of couplets, and, after him, Pope.

At the same time the heroic couplet never displaced other measures completely. Dryden, to name no other, wrote tragedies and a romantic play in blank verse. He delighted readers—he delights them still—with his mastery of the irregular ode. *Alexander's Feast*, for example, is in stanzas of varying length, a chorus, which repeats the last four or five lines of the preceding stanza, coming between each pair of stanzas, and there is a grand chorus of ten lines at the end. The arrangement of the lines of a stanza is after the following manner :

A Dragon's fiery Form bely'd the God :
Sublime on Radiant Spires He rode,
When *He to fair Olympia* press'd :
And while He sought *her snowy Breast* :
Then round her slender Waist he curl'd,
And stamp'd an Image of himself, a Sov'raign of the World.
The list'ning crowd admire the lofty Sound,
A present Deity, they shout around :
A present Deity, the vaulted Roofs rebound.
With ravish'd Ears
The Monarch hears,
Assumes the God,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the *Spheres*.

That is a long w[illegible] from the heroic couplet. Then, during the eighteenth [illegible]y, the four poets whom we considered last week—Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake—were reviving in England the poetry of suggestion, the verse that sounds as the utterance of an oracle or the voice of a seer, the poetry of undertones. At the same time in Scotland Robert Burns used the freedom which he found to have already been so successful in the rhythms of Scottish song. Blake, as we have seen, showed that he

was as much at home in this songful verse as in the wild and lurid verse of prophetic strangeness. However, it was thanks to Coleridge, first by means of his publication of *The Ancient Mariner*, and then even more through his publication of *Christabel*, that English poets in general were finally released from the tyranny of the couplet and that the way was opened for a mingling of metres. In *Christabel*, as in *The Ancient Mariner*, lines of two-syllabled feet are interwoven with lines of feet of three syllables.

> They crossed the moat, and Christabel
> Took the key that fitted well;
> A little door she opened straight,
> All in the middle of the gate;
> The gate that was ironed within and without,
> Where an army in battle array had marched out.

In this passage we have, not only the interweaving of two kinds of feet, but also substitution:

> *Took* the key that fitted well;
>
> *All* in the middle of the gate.

The accent must fall on the first syllable. In the other lines it does not. So, by striking off the fetters that constricted prosody, as well as by using a more concrete and more stimulating vocabulary, Coleridge, and with him Wordsworth, opened the way to a general revival of the poetry that is as an incantation, the poetry of suggestion.

From then on, all the way to the present day, that is the poetry which has appealed most to both poets and readers. What is looked upon to-day as being "new" poetry is simply poetry which exhibits the latest and most far-reaching development of the revolution carried out jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge. A broader gulf separates the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth from the poetry of Pope than divides the "new" poetry of to-day from the poetry of Browning or Tennyson. Indeed, we might reasonably speak of the "new" poetry, not of to-day, but of the last 145 years. That "new" poetry is not

peculiar to English. In the same period there has been "new" poetry in all the languages of literature. And in all languages it contrasts with classic poetry—the poetry, for example, of the seventeenth century in France, the French poetry, that is to say, that corresponds with the verbal, sophisticated, or urban poetry in the England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Undoubtedly there are to-day, as there have been in the past, readers who find themselves baffled and thwarted by novelty in poetry. A few people may experience no perplexity. They immediately grasp or apprehend the sense or purpose of the novelty contained in some contemporary, some newly-written poem. They—presumably—are the people thanks to whom in any age novelty is ultimately accepted and so can be incorporated in future practice. Other people, and perhaps most people, find a poem which differs from what they have been accustomed to incomprehensible. Any such poem they declare to be difficult. It is a fair question to ask how far the difficulty is ever real. For the term "difficult" applied to poetry that exhibits novelty is itself novel, or recent. The poetry of Browning is the first to have been called difficult because it contained novelty. Before Browning novelty was not called difficulty; it was called silliness. We all know that the poetry of Wordsworth, for instance, simply because it showed novelty, was at first called silly. Yet to-day nobody finds the poetry of Browning difficult—difficult, at least, in this sense—or the poetry of Wordsworth silly. So we are entitled to expect that the "new" poetry of to-day is in reality no more difficult than it is silly; and that, in due time, it will come to be looked upon as being simply poetry exactly as the once "new" poetry of earlier periods now is.

In order for that to happen, however, the mass of readers of verse will have to grow aware of what the "new" poetry of to-day is, what it is doing, what it is up to. Let us begin by considering, not the "new" poetry of the last thirty to thirty-five years, but the larger body of

"new" poetry of which that is, as I have said, only the latest development. Let us consider the "new" poetry of the last 145 years, the "new" poetry begun in England in 1798 with the publication of *The Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge and of *Tintern Abbey* by Wordsworth. You will recall my saying that this "new" poetry has found utterance in all the languages of literature. In all languages the "new" poet—"new" being taken as I have just defined it—the "new" poet, I say, draws on his imagination for giving body or substance to what seem to be dreamings—visions—inspirations: vague scenes visualized or states of mind beheld fleetingly—while he is musing or "idling." Intellectual notions the "new" poet transforms into suggestive descriptive statements, commonly and misleadingly called symbols. Each descriptive statement is such as to produce in the reader that emotion which it is the poet's aim to produce. The only way to excite emotion in a reader is to hit on a descriptive statement—a sentence or even only a phrase—which shall cause him to experience that emotion as he reads. If a writer wishes to suggest to a reader the emotion of pity, it is no good his discoursing on pity. He must make the reader picture, say, some young woman sobbing her heart out. That is a purposely crude example. More particularly, if a writer wishes to suggest to a reader the peacefulness of eventide in the country, he must find some definite image which will cause the reader to imagine himself in a situation where he would feel the peacefulness.

> How soft the music of those village bells
> Falling at intervals upon the ear
> In cadence sweet!

The poet, that is to say, plays on his reader's sensibility. I said last week that in order to enjoy poetry we must be in a passive state, in a state which will allow us to undergo its effects. In order to move his reader as radically as possible, the "new" poet—again, please notice, not merely in English, but in all languages, and over a period going

back more than a century—takes advantage of the essential characteristics of verse—namely, number and rhythm—in order to do two things. At the same time as by means of number and rhythm he awakens the reader's sensibility, so that it is put in a state of eager receptiveness, by means likewise of number and rhythm he soothes the reader's rational and analytic faculties into quiescence. Intent on the one aim of moving the reader, not only with the beauty of his choice and arrangement of words, but through his power of suggestion, the "new" poet does not try to be logical. He does not try to be perspicuous. In prose there is only one form of words that will convey exactly a precise meaning, and it is the duty of the writer *in prose* to hit on that particular form or sequence of words. In the "new" poetry, on the contrary, there are no exact statements because there is no precise meaning. In the "new" poetry that is, as it were, inspired, that is, as it were, an incantation, the aim is, I repeat, emotional suggestion, and each piece of suggestion, each suggestive descriptive statement, each suggestive image, may set up one or more of half a dozen trains of mingled feeling and understanding. The poet appears to be following the arabesques of his fancy. In fact, the pattern which is the poem obeys the logic, not of fancy, but of feeling.

For this reason, the "new" poet of the last century and more chooses, whatever the language in which he happens to write, words rich in suggestion and association. The statements he makes are cast in the form most productive of suggestion, most likely to be rich in immediate associations for the reader. Hence the vocabulary of the "new" poet is not the vocabulary of prose. Nor is his diction that of prose. In reading any "new" poetry of the last 145 years in English, we need, as readers, to fall in with this intention. We do not want to put our minds to the hopeless and mistaken task of turning a poem of this kind into a kind of mental prose. We want to leave full play to the influences of suggestion and association which any poem of this "new" poetry seeks

to exert. We want to let our feelings respond spontaneously to the forces in the poem which are waiting to solicit them. All this applies, as I say, to the "new" poetry in all languages. In English it applies to most of the poetry written in the last 145 years. It applies, for instance, to Keats's famous ode *To Autumn:*

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir, the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

It applies, in short, to countless poems over which nobody any longer shakes his head and mutters: "Really, *this* isn't poetry."

So much we should bear in mind when we address ourselves to the newer poetry; that is to say, to the "new" poetry of the last thirty to thirty-five years, the "new" poetry which is the subject of this evening's lecture. For there has been within those thirty to thirty-five years a further development in poetry. The "new" poetry of this period has no new aim. It aims at doing everything that most poetry since 1798 has aimed at. It is "new" only in its methods. That is why people are inclined to be baffled and thwarted by it. That is why people tend to dismiss it as being "difficult." The methods of the "new" poetry can at first seem strange. They make poetry new in four ways—in its prosody, in its statements, in its allusiveness, in its associations. Let us consider the novelties one by one, and see if we can understand them.

First, the prosody. Ever since the publication by Coleridge of *Christabel* especially, prosody has been gaining in breadth. It has been claiming more and more

freedom. Keats is at least as notable for his prosodic novelty as for that note of "reminiscence" characteristic of his poetry—the note of reminiscence which has upon the reader the effect of filling him with nostalgia for an imaginary past. The metric variety of Shelley, and even more of Tennyson, is immense. No art stands still. Let me say this again. And as the art of poetry does not stand still, it was only to be expected that novelty of metre and rhythm should go on till a reaction might supervene, as the vogue of the heroic couplet had supervened in the seventeenth century on the degeneration of blank verse. The time was bound to come, that is to say, when a poet would feel that he could best obey his Muse by mingling, not merely two, but a variety of metres within a same poem, and also, or alternatively, by allowing himself the greatest freedom in rhythm. This was the more to be expected in English that, for one thing, the poetry of no country remains unaffected by the poetry of other countries, and that in the latter part of the nineteenth century a novelty was introduced into French poetry—the innovation called *vers libre*. This is a form of versification in which two or more metres are mingled, or prosodic restrictions are transcended, or, again, variable rhythm is substituted for a fixed metre. It was also the more to be expected, for another thing—and the fact is one easily overlooked by persons who try to read some of the "new" poetry of to-day without having first made themselves really at home in English poetry as a whole—it was also the more to be expected, I say, that at no time has English verse been unrelated to the current spoken speech.

Wordsworth wrote in 1798, in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, that the poems he had contributed to the volume "were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adopted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." He "apprehended," he went on to say, "that the more conversant the reader is with our elder writers, and with those in modern times who have been the most

successful in painting manners and passions," the less the reader was likely to complain that the poet had " sometimes descended too low, and that many of his expressions were too familiar, and not of sufficient dignity." But in the course of the century and a half which has elapsed since the volume appeared, even readers " conversant with our elder writers " have not been won to admiration of *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, which begins :

> Oh ! what's the matter ? What's the matter ?
> What is't that ails young Harry Gill ?
> That evermore his teeth they chatter,
> Chatter, chatter, chatter still.
> Of waistcoats Harry has no lack,
> Good duffle grey, and flannel fine ;
> He has a blanket on his back,
> And coats enough to smother nine.

Yet this does not mean that Wordsworth was completely off the track. His implication that the verse of " our elder writers " is close to the spoken language of their day cannot be disputed. The vogue of the heroic couplet in the second half of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth was possible precisely because the speech current during these periods had become elaborate and formal, not the speech of " the middle and lower classes of society," but the speech of the reading public of the town. So it is that we should expect the most recent developments of the tendencies started by the revolution which Wordsworth and Coleridge carried out in poetry to take the form of a greater freedom of rhythm as regards prosody, and, as regards diction, a mimicry of twentieth-century speech.

And this is what has happened :

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.

The lines are a specimen of the " new " poetry of the last thirty to thirty-five years. They are the opening

lines of a poem entitled *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. It is a poem of 433 lines. I select this poem to draw upon in order to illustrate the nature of the "new" poetry, because since its publication in 1922 it has governed most of the subsequent "new" poetry written in our time. The novelty which it introduced into the writing of verse has been successful. As I said to begin with this evening, novelty in art is successful when it satisfies the auditor or spectator, and when also it is adopted by other artists. This is what has happened with the novelty of *The Waste Land*. And therefore the author is important —important as were in their day Edmund Waller, Dryden and Pope, Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge.

You will have noticed that in *The Waste Land* there is, instead of rhyme, the highly effective words "breeding," "mixing," "stirring," at the end of lines. They are highly effective in that they minister to the effect of an incantation. Furthermore, occupying this position, they not only ensure a running on of the sense from one line to another; they also acquire emphasis. But though rhymeless, the lines are not blank verse. They vary in length from ten syllables to five. There is no rigid iambic beat. Instead we have free rhythms. And yet underlying the rhythms the beat is present. We are reminded of the mature blank verse of Shakespeare, a specimen of which I quoted a little while back. There is a backbone, but nothing so unyielding as a mould. The justification of composing lines of verse in this form is that the sound of them is instantly seductive. They compel a sensitive reader's instant surrender to them. The use of free rhythms with mastery heightens the affective power of the poem. We are not concerned with whether or not to use these rhythms with mastery implies great skill. As readers, we are concerned only with the fact that these sequences of words are so selected and arranged that to read them stirs in us a strong emotional response. The strength of this response, as well as its quality, are evidence that the poem succeeds

in being what I have called "like an incantation." We still have in these lines the poetry of emotional suggestion, the poetry of undertones. The varied and unusual rhythms intensify the poetry. That, of course, is why the poet has used them. That is why this particular prosodic novelty has been introduced into contemporary poetry. There is nothing freakish or perverse about the discarding of the old rigid metres. There is no intention to mystify. The novelty has arisen—naturally, one might say. More precisely, it has arisen from the carrying a step further of a tendency which has been accepted in English poetry for a century and a half—the tendency to vary and mix metres—for the purpose for which all poetry is written—the production of emotional effect. The intention behind the use of the novelty is not to puzzle, or to confuse, or to impress, the reading public. The intention is to intensify the poetry and to keep it in contact with current speech. That older poets, such as the late W. B. Yeats, have not appreciated the novelty means no more than meant the disapproval of Blake or Byron by Southey, or the disapproval of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats by their elders. The measure of the success of the novelty is the influence which it has exerted on most young writers of verse since *The Waste Land* was published. In one way or another these young writers have taken over the novelty into their own work. And as I said to begin with this evening, whenever a novelty in art is adopted generally that novelty has succeeded.

New in its prosody, the "new" poetry is new also in its statements—in many of its statements. That is to say, it states in a new way.

> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.

Just now I quoted lines 1 to 4 of *The Waste Land.* These are lines 5 to 7. That is how the poem goes on. I quote these further lines especially for the sake of drawing

your attention to the statement: "Feeding a little life with dried tubers." If you stop to consider, you will agree that the statement is striking. Whatever it says, it is saying it in a new way. Nobody before Eliot had ever said anything in that way. It is brand-new imagery —a brand-new way of summing up a wide diversity of impression. To attempt radical novelty of statement in verse, to attempt brand-new imagery, is bold. But once again, the only question we need ask ourselves is: Is the attempt successful? Quite obviously, it is successful. There is something curiously moving about the statement: "Feeding a little life with dried tubers." At the same time it is as straightforwardly intelligible as any statement in the poetry of suggestion need ever be. And it is immensely rich in suggestion. A few years ago I met the retired headmaster of a country grammar school, and I remember how full of enthusiasm he was for *The Waste Land*. This ex-headmaster would not like to be called literary. He is mainly interested in mathematics and physics. Yet for all his having been on the "science" or "modern" side, when he first came across *The Waste Land*—to which, by the way, he was introduced by a schoolboy—he responded instantly. The poem quite carried him away. "Feeding a little life with dried tubers" was one of several fragments he quoted to me with intense relish. He said he could recall no one since Shakespeare who had been at once so signally and so satisfyingly original.

What most deserves to be noticed about such novel statements as "Feeding a little life with dried tubers" is their tremendous power of suggestion. They seem to give the reader the sensation of a whole field of impression. Of this we shall become even more strongly aware if I pick out some other novel statements from different poems by T. S. Eliot:

> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table.

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing, waiting.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers.

If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit.

The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history, the backward half-look
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.

All these images, when first used, were images each brand new of its kind. They are extraordinarily vivid and suggestive. They are words adopted to a novel end. They make words, that is, say what had not been said before. Their common feature, I suggest, is an association of the unexpected with the appropriate. To say that "the evening is spread out against the sky" is to say something unexpected about the evening. It is *also* perfectly appropriate. The sea picking bones *in* whispers —that is unexpected and yet so appropriate as to be onomatopoeic—"in whispers," the whispers of the sea water in its depths. And how suggestive! To-day nearly every writer of verse tries to make such statements. That is the measure of the success of the novelty. If the imitations do not rival the originals in quality, that only shows that such statements cannot be produced just thanks to a knack, such as any one may pick up.

New in its prosody, new in its statements, the "new" poetry is new also in its allusiveness. It is of course in no sense new that poetry should be allusive. Poetry has always been allusive, exactly as poetry has always been in metre—"numerous verse," as Milton put it—exactly as poetry has always made statements. The novelty lies in how the "new" poetry is allusive. That is what is new.

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

In those four lines Tennyson brings before the reader the whole of the main features of a rich and active landscape. Its power lies in its being a dream landscape. We are not told what castle or where are the snow-topped mountains, the lakes, and the waterfall. And that is all to the good. We do not want to know. So long as the castle can be any castle, the mountains dream mountains, the lakes dream lakes, and the waterfall the waterfall of our imagination, the power of suggestion in four short lines is tremendous. Yet the "new" poetry can pack into five lines—only one line more—far more suggestion.

The "new" poetry has abandoned seeking to move the reader with scenery out of some phantom land or by means of tropes with "splendour," "old in story," "in glory," or similar words and phrases. It picks on scenes of every day, and it sets out to move the reader by making him aware, by making him feel, that it is there, in those scenes of every day, and underlying them, that the real strangeness and magic of the world are lurking and are busy. It speaks to the reader, not of dream castles, dream mountains, dream sheets of water, but of city streets, the clangour of traffic, the stink of petrol, the crowding of public houses and their smells of stale beer, stale tobacco, sawdust, and sweat. It speaks to the reader of the literary and other recollections with which these sights, noises, and smells can be associated, and thereby it somehow sums up, condenses, the means of releasing emotion in the reader, the emotion of the whole vast drama of life.

In one of the poems of the "new" poetry we may be at one moment having recalled to us a thoroughly familiar corner of the contemporary scene and the next moment be reminded of some great poetic drama and of its effects on us when we read it or saw it performed.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

I said the "new" poetry could do more to the reader in five lines than Tennyson in four lines of one of his best lyrics. The five lines I have just quoted are from, once again, *The Waste Land*. To any one coming to the "new" poetry for the first time, it may seem odd that those lines should be called poetry or even verse. Let us forget the formal novelty, however. Let us concentrate on what the lines may do to a reader. In the first place, they may awaken associations lying at the back of his mind, associations with pubs at closing time, with the chatter of the customers as they pour out into the night of the street; and, then, in the second place, they connect for the reader those commonplace scenes, having for him, perhaps, their pathos beyond the commonplace, with the play *Hamlet*, and in particular with poor Ophelia, who utters such a pathetic good-night to King Claudius and Queen Gertrude after she has suffered the contumely of Hamlet, after her father Polonius has been slain; poor *Ophelia* whom her troubles have driven *mad*. *Those* "Good-nights" exchanged as a pub empties out its customers—how moving when made by juxtaposition reminiscent of the "Good-nights" of Ophelia!

Frequently, the "new" poetry thus unites the low and the high, the everyday and the unique, and in doing so it may give readers a new feeling from poetry. Here again the value of the novelty is to be measured by its success. And in judging the success we must of course never forget that our emotion is not just that of fused reminiscence, but the specific poetic emotion, an emotion produced by the words.

We have just seen that *The Waste Land* suddenly confronts the reader with a quotation from *Hamlet*. Let us notice this use of quotation particularly. Poets in the past have often echoed passages or lines of the work of earlier poets. Hardly a line of Gray's *Elegy* is, you remember, without its classical parallel. Poets have also, but less often, included quotations in their verse. Nevertheless, the use made of quotation in the "new" poetry is perhaps what is most new about its allusiveness.

It is, so to speak, a surreptitious use. The quotations are slipped in without notice. That is no doubt all right, you will say, for a reader who recognizes any such quotation. In his case, a quotation may call up a whole crowd of affective associations, and the allusiveness, novel though it may be, will have been completely successful. But what—we may ask—what about the readers—and they may be many—who fail to identify such a quotation? What happens with the allusiveness then? The point is well taken. For a reader of *The Waste Land* may have seen *Hamlet* performed a number of times in his life, and may even have read *Hamlet* more than once, and yet when he comes upon the words:

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night,

he will not recall that they occur in *Hamlet*: he will not identify the words. And even if we grant that at any rate the words of Ophelia ought to be fairly well known, it has to be admitted that the "new" poetry by no means confines itself to using well-known bits of quotation.

Sin is Behovely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well.

Those are three lines which occur in T. S. Eliot's most recent poem, *Little Gidding*. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that they are a quotation, and if a reader were to guess that they were quoted from some writer or other, he would have to be exceptionally well read to identify their source. For they are a quotation from a devotional piece of writing entitled *Revelations of Divine Love* by the anchoress Juliana of Norwich, who lived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is true the Lady Juliana has lately come into fashion among certain groups of churchgoers, but a reader might have learned to appreciate quite a lot of poetry and yet never have heard of her. How on earth, you may accordingly say, can the average reader be expected, even if he is "cultivated," to identify such a quotation, especially when it is not enclosed in inverted commas?

And what about quotations in German?

> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
>
> *Frisch weht der Wind*
> *Der Heimat zu*
> *Mein Irisch Kind*
> *Wo weilest du?*

The passage is from *The Waste Land.*

Or what of quotations in French?

> Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
> You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!

That, again, is from *The Waste Land.*

> It'll come in handy. He's artful. Please, will you
> Give us a light?
> Light
> Light
> Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT.

That is the conclusion of another poem by T. S. Eliot, a poem entitled *Triumphal March.*

It is not new for quotations in a foreign language to occur in English poetry. In the past poets have sometimes quoted the classics in their own work. Byron, in *Don Juan,* introduces more than once a little Latin. For instance:

> And Virgil's songs are pure, except the horrid one
> Beginning with "Formosum pastor Corydon."

But there is a great difference between this quotation in Byron's day, when classical poetry was still widely known among the reading public, of one of Virgil's more notorious eclogues, and the quotation to-day of French or German writers, some of whom may be obscure so far as English readers are concerned. And, indeed, when such writers

are quoted in poems, the aim or purpose is not that which Byron had in quoting Virgil.

Perhaps the first thing to be noticed about the quotations that occur in the poetry of T. S. Eliot is that they are of two kinds. I have just said that the source of some may be obscure to us. But others are, or should be, well known. It is reasonable to expect that the one in German I have shown you, *Frisch weht der Wind*, will be recognized at once by any one who has ever attended a performance of Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde*. The words quoted are the beginning of the song which the sailor at the mast-head sings to Isolde in the first act, as the boat in which Tristan is bringing her from Ireland speeds towards Cornwall, where she is to marry King Mark. It is a song of warning—" *Wo weilest du?* "—and the recall of it is appropriate in the poem *The Waste Land* after the line :

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

So with the first of the quotations in French that I have read out to you. " Hypocrite lecteur! mon semblable, mon frère ! " is a quotation which has become familiar to readers of French to-day. It is quoted from the preface to the collected poems of the French nineteenth-century poet Baudelaire. Whoever has once come across the words is unlikely to forget them, for they are memorable. And it happens that Baudelaire is a French poet who is fairly well known in England. Arthur Symons wrote about him in the nineties of last century, and translated some of his poems. Ever since then English people have read and discussed him. And the words " Hypocrite lecteur !—mon semblable—mon frère ! " have often been quoted from him by both French and English writers. It may thus be said that the quotation in French from Baudelaire is even more easily recognizable than the quotation in German from Wagner. Furthermore, when we read or hear it in its context in the poem, we see that, like the quotation in German from Wagner, it is used with peculiar appositeness :

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!

The reference to a corpse planted last year in the garden is evidently intended to call up in the reader the vague dread associated with an uneasy conscience. And all the rest of the passage I have just read aloud thereupon follows logically.

The foreign quotations that are recognizable stand accordingly on the same footing as recognizable quotations in English. The quotation from *Hamlet* comes appositely after the record of the good-nights outside the pub at closing time:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

It is easy to see that the part assigned to such quotations in the "new" poetry is identical with the part played by other "machinery" in older poetry. Let us take a passage from William Cowper (eighteenth century) which I quoted last week:

There is in souls a sympathy with sounds;
And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleased
With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave;
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.
How soft the music of those village bells
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet!

Here the poet begins by making a generalization, an then he supplies an instance of its particular applicatio

The three lines beginning "How soft the music" clinch what has gone before, as we speak of an argument being clinched. So in the "new" poetry the quotation:

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu,

clinches what has gone before:

Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

That my shadow should be behind me or ahead of me is a fact to which normally I pay no attention. In the poem my shadow is strangely, disturbingly, connected with being shadowed. This is followed by the mysterious threat "I will show you fear." And, then, to sum up both there come the words of the song of warning out of *Tristan*. So, likewise, the quotation:

hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!

clinches what has gone before, both the line:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

and the other lines suggestive of a skeleton in the cupboard. The quotation makes all that into a so-called *argumentum ad hominem*; it brings all that home to the reader himself. So, likewise, the quotation from *Hamlet*:

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night,

clinches what has gone before:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

In each instance the quotation broadens the reference as the description of the sound of village bells narrows the reference in the passage from *The Task* of William Cowper. Where earlier poetry narrowed, the "new" poetry broadens. But the step in poetic discourse, which I call "clinching," is in both poetries the same.

I am presupposing, you may say, that the quotations, whether in English or in some foreign language, are recognized by the reader of the poem in which they happen to occur. It is when the source of a quotation is recognized and its content brought to mind that a quotation will most successfully clinch what has been said in the poem immediately before it occurs. But what if the reader does not recognize a quotation, fails to identify its source, or even fails altogether to realize that it is a quotation? We must raise that question; for nothing is more likely than that some readers at least, even if they happen to have read a fair quantity of English poetry, will fail to recognize the words of Ophelia to which I have referred; and still less the quotation from *Tristan und Isolde*, or the one from the preface to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*. And it is even more likely that few readers will recognize:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well,

or recognize:

> Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT.

This line in French, I may point out, is quoted from the first page of a book entitled *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence* by the French political writer Charles Maurras. The book appeared about 1905; the poem *Triumphal March*, in which the line is quoted, was published in 1930. Even somebody who had read the book would be unlikely, when coming upon the words in the poem, to recall where he had seen them before. Let all that be granted. It can be granted, for it does not matter. There is no need

for a reader to identify the source of either of these quotations. It is enough, for each to play its effective part in the poem into which it has been introduced, that the reader shall be aware that a quotation is what it is. And aware of this, it is, I think, almost impossible he should fail to be, if he has his wits about him. The poem *Little Gidding* is in the language of to-day. But the word "behovely" is not part of the language of to-day. It is obviously an archaic word. Therefore the sentence:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well,

must, when it occurs in the middle of the poem *Little Gidding*, be a quotation from some piece of writing of a bygone age. *Triumphal March* is a poem in English. But the words:

Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT,

are in French. Therefore they must be a quotation. And in order to undergo the effect of the placing at this point of the assurance that:

> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well,

it is only necessary to grasp that the assurance is quoted from some bygone devotional writer. So, in order to undergo the effect in their particular place of the words:

Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT,

it is only necessary to grasp that they must be the reported words of some Frenchman; it is only necessary to know enough French to understand the words and see what they mean. Some Frenchman has been asked if soldiers lined a certain processional route. He repeats the question, and then replies with great emphasis or gusto: "I should think they did," or "You bet your life they did!" At the end of a poem entitled *Triumphal March* this is clearly effective.

But supposing a reader does not know French; supposing

a reader has never heard of Wagner or Baudelaire; supposing a reader is not sufficiently familiar with *Hamlet* to be able to identify the words of Ophelia. The suppositions afford no reason why a poet should not insert quotations in his work for the benefit of those readers who will identify them. There is nothing new in a poet's making an allusion which only the enlightened will understand. When Browning gave a series of poems in pamphlets the title *Bells and Pomegranates*, the reference was to the High Priest's robe in Exodus xxviii, but the public generally did not realize this. It does not follow that Browning made a mistake.

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
> That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.

Those are lines from one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Few of those who have enjoyed the performance of the play are likely to have understood that they refer to the theory of poetic inspiration put forward by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, the theory I spoke of last week. Does anybody on that account reproach Shakespeare for the reference? If they miss the allusion in those lines, that does not spoil the play for them.

When a popular writer, J. B. Priestley, remarks in the course of a novel called *Faraway*: "They themselves were such stuff as films are made of, and their lives were rounded by a little celluloid," only one reader in five hundred may realize that Priestley is parodying Prospero's speech in the fourth act of *The Tempest*:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

When another popular writer, P. G. Wodehouse, in his novel *Summer Moonshine*, causes a character to say:

"Standing with reluctant feet where the eggs and bacon meet," the allusion is to two lines in Longfellow's poem *Maidenhood*

> Standing with reluctant feet
> Where the brook and river meet.

Yet when many readers of the novel came upon the remark, they cannot have known this. Is it to be contended that because most readers of Priestley and Wodehouse cannot identify such allusions, Priestley and Wodehouse are to refrain from amusing or irritating the few hundreds who will recognize them? Of course not.

And what must be held legitimate for Shakespeare, who has been called the most universal of poets—that is to say, the poet who appeals to everybody—and what must be held legitimate for popular novelists, whose readers range through every degree of education and experience of life, cannot be denied to a poet, who, after all, addresses himself quite plainly, like Browning, to cultivated readers. After all, we should remember that the "new" poetry is not competing with the lighter side of broadcasting or with the super-cinema. Hence, even if the effects aimed at in the "new" poetry by the introduction of quotations could succeed with only a small number of readers, we should not be justified in condemning that kind of allusiveness. But, as I have already indicated, it is by no means unlikely that, even where readers of the "new" poetry fail to identify a quotation and therefore fail to have its context brought into their minds, they do at least recognize that the words of a quotation are quoted words; and thanks to doing that they will undergo at least part of the effect intended.

I have now shown you how the "new" poetry is new in its prosody, new in its statements, and new in its allusiveness. It remains to speak of how it is new in its associations. As it happens, I have been considering its associations for some little while. In fact, what I have called the allusiveness of the "new" poetry—the presence in a poem

of quotations—is one of the ways in which this poetry seeks to cause the reader to associate in feeling areas of experience which this reader may have hitherto regarded as disparate and which he might never bring together but for the stimulus effected by the poet. Lines I have already quoted are an example:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

The reader's feelings are suddenly switched. For four lines he is having the attention of those feelings fixed on the evocation of the voices in and at the door of a public house at closing time. In the fifth line the attention of his feelings is abruptly diverted to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and to fair Ophelia's farewell to sanity. In thus having the focus of emotional attention switched, the reader is being made to feel a kinship between the voices of the pub and the speech of Ophelia, between the good-nights of the pub customers and Ophelia's good-nights. That is to say, the reader is presented with a novel association. It is novel; that is to say, it was not attempted by poetry till within the last thirty years or so. And what is done in the passage I have quoted to link the good-nights of pub customers with the good-nights of Ophelia is what is done also in each of the passages ending with a quotation that I have read to you this evening. Each time a quotation occurs in the "new" poetry the intention is to bring about, not in the reader's mind, but in the reader's sensibility, a novel association; that is to say, an association of a kind which poetry had not hitherto set about establishing.

Moreover, these associations which are, as it were, precipitated by the introduction of a quotation are only one kind of association of feeling which the "new" poetry aims at producing, or, rather, the quotation-device is

only one of the means employed in the "new" poetry to bring about in the reader's sensibility unexpected, unprecedented associations. It is often by means of the juxtaposition in a poem of statements of sharply divergent reference that an association is brought about, only as a rule there is no quotation. And an association may also be brought about through the ambiguity, or variety of suggestion, of a single statement. The intention is always of course to cause the reader either to harmonize in feeling the hitherto disparate, or else to be moved by the contrast which the juxtaposition or ambiguity emphasizes.

It is in this peculiar power of reconciling, or sometimes of contrasting, the apparently totally disparate that the "new" poetry is perhaps most novel. I have already said that to stop to look for a rational coherent thread in any of the poetry of suggestion is a mistake. It is especially a mistake to look for one in the "new" poetry. No doubt the reader of a poem of the "new" poetry may be able, if he tries, to thread together its successive statements according to some rational scheme and thereby to achieve, so to speak, a prose summary of the poem. But this summary will not be the poem, and in a sense it will miss out everything that makes the poem poetic. The reader's proper business is, let me repeat, to allow himself to undergo a poem, to let its statements suggest the complex of affective associations which they are intended to suggest, to let them do this by responding to the poem, by meeting it, so to speak, on its own ground. Of course, the more he "knows" the richer will be his response. But to complain of a poet's obscurity is no remedy for the reader's want of "knowing."

There is nothing new in the way the "new" poetry operates on the sensibility of its readers.

> Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
> Nor wakes the cypress in the palace walk;
> Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
> The firefly wakens: waken thou with me.

Those are the opening lines of a beautiful lyric in Tennyson's poem *The Princess*, a lyric which is justly celebrated. If readers have been enraptured with it, it is not through anything which their rational and analytic faculties can make of it : it is because of its appeal to their sensibility, and because of the response which it calls forth from their sensibility. The lyric stirs us with its verbal music, and it stirs us by means of the suggestion in its statements, stirs us through the associations which its statements lead us to form. The " new " poetry proceeds in precisely the same fashion. What alone is new is the nature of the allusiveness, the stripping from the statements of everything not required for the excitement of our feelings, of everything not required for suggestion. A piece of the " new " poetry may seem meaningless simply because it can " mean " so much. The bareness of its statements allows of its linking in our sensibility spheres of feeling we may have hitherto looked upon as disparate, as thoroughly alien to one another, but the stimulus to associate for the first time those spheres of feeling results in pleasure ; and the occurrence of the pleasure accounts for the attraction which the " new " poetry holds for those who have been able to surrender successfully to its suggestion, for those from whom it has elicited a satisfying response of feeling.

The difficulty of showing you how the " new " poetry operates in this respect is the difficulty of selecting a passage that shall be at once sufficiently short, sufficiently self-contained, and sufficiently simple. The passage, that is, must be sufficiently simple not to lead us into an interminable disquisition.

I have already referred to T. S. Eliot's poem *Triumphal March*, and have quoted its ending. This is how it begins :

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses' heels
Over the paving.
And the flags. And the trumpets. And so many eagles.
How many ? Count them. And such a press of people.

We hardly knew ourselves that day, or knew the City.
This is the way to the temple, and we so many crowding the way.
So many waiting, how many waiting? what did it matter, on such a day?
Are they coming? No, not yet. You can see some eagles.
And hear the trumpets.
Here they come. Is he coming?
The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving.
We can wait with our stools and our sausages.
What comes first? Can you see?

The poem is one of two, for which the general title is *Coriolan.* But let us neglect that. The poem itself is called *Triumphal March.* The title is enough, presumably, to carry us back to the Victory March in London in June 1919. And the opening lines strengthen our emotional recollections of that day. You notice that no words are wasted. We begin at once with a string of short, sharp words evocative of troops marching by, guns, horseshoes, generals, the sound of horses stepping on the paving.

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses' heels.

The line is reminiscent of Shakespeare's famous description of the horse in *Venus and Adonis*:

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide.

Then, in the third line of *Triumphal March,* we come suddenly on the words "And so many eagles." They at once carry us away from June 1919. They suggest other triumphs. Those of Napoleon, perhaps; and, still more, the triumphs in Ancient Rome. It is not a question of what we think, but of what we feel, at the suggestion of those triumphs, coming as it does on top of the reminder of the British Victory March of 1919. Then there is another leap into another field of feeling. After the words "And such a press of people," which suggest

simply the crowd at a Victory March, or at a coronation procession or royal funeral, there are the lines :

We hardly knew ourselves that day, or knew the City.
This is the way to the temple, and we so many crowding the way.

" We hardly knew the City." We readers are still reading from the standpoint of spectators in the crowd pressing to see the British Victory March, and yet at the same time we may now have from these words the suggestion of a former city standing ghost-like amid the present city : Imperial Rome, for instance, haunting the Rome of the present day. " This is the way to the temple " are words which bear us still farther away. Perhaps we shall vaguely feel, feel imaginatively, vaguely visualize, the temple in Ancient Rome or in Ancient Athens, and we shall feel the part which the temple played in the lives of the citizens of each of those cities. Furthermore, the way to the temple is the way to salvation, to solace, to sacrifice, to gaining divine support for the undertakings of the city, to salvation. Thereupon, the words " And we so many crowding the way," coming as they do so soon after " And such a press of people," may acquire for us—if we are appropriately attuned to the poem—their full emotional significance. All that is an example of how the " new " poetry sets up trains of associations in the reader.

Let us pass to the lines :

Here they come. Is he coming ?
The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving.
We can wait with our stools and our sausages.

" Is he coming ? " Who ? Obviously the victor, the triumphant general. In saying no more than " Is he coming ? " the poem makes us conscious—conscious emotionally—of the tension of expectation. Then, however, a tremendous leap seems to be required of us. In the next line :

The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving,

we seem at first to have entirely forsaken the Victory March and the eager, waiting crowd pressing forward to see. If the line were not in sound so curiously seductive, it might be a statement extracted from some manual of psychology. But that is only a passing, superficial impression. There lies in the line something deeper. It may be the suggestion that a triumphal march is not only the troops, the guns, the cavalry, the tanks, the aircraft overhead, and not only the great general; but also the press of onlookers, the onlookers who wait and perceive, who do a lot of waiting for comparatively little perceiving. At the same time, in being a general affirmation about the character of our individual, our personal, human life, it can detach the reader's feelings from the standpoint which he has been led to adopt so far, the standpoint from which he identifies himself with the crowd that waits and then cranes its necks to see. From that it can detach the reader's feelings and raise up those feelings, transport them, so to speak, into an imaginary helicopter hovering over both the procession and the waiting crowd along the route. Up there the crowd appears no longer as a nation or city celebrating victory in war, but becomes a mass of individuals, each of whom is perceiving and waiting to perceive. Their natural waking lives are a perceiving. In one line of verse a suggestion is made to us that may fill us with a sense of detachment in which we reconcile the waiting, peering crowd with the whole of human life, the life naturally devoted by human beings throughout their waking moments to the reception of a steady stream of perception. The effect of the line ushers in that of the next line:

> We can wait with our stools and our sausages.

The reader having been momentarily detached from the waiting crowd and led to feel about that crowd in terms of the lot of the natural waking life of the individual, he is next brought back to that crowd and to its waiting to perceive, its pathetic waiting with stools on which to sit

and rest, and with sausages that will repair the missing of a meal during the long wait. Then, at last, the procession appears :

What comes first? Can you see?

And that completes the passage I have quoted. With all this exegesis in mind, listen now to the whole passage again :

Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses' heels
Over the paving.
And the flags. And the trumpets. And so many eagles.
How many? Count them. And such a press of people.
We hardly knew ourselves that day, or knew the City.
This is the way to the temple, and we so many crowding the way.
So many waiting, how many waiting? What did it matter, on such a day?
Are they coming? No, not yet. You can see some eagles.
And hear the trumpets.
Here they come. Is he coming?
The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving.
We can wait with our stools and our sausages.
What comes first? Can you see?

At this second hearing, the power of suggestion in the passage, the impression of tension, has surely become unmistakable ; and we should also now be in no doubt about the way the " new " poetry is new in its associations. All life in the raw is heterogeneous. It is only by effecting associations amid the welter of impressions that we establish any order in our experience. The " new " poetry, by means of the associations which it suggests to our sensibility, aims at establishing within us a further and new order, so that, as a poem causes " life's common chord " to clash forth, we may, in Browning's words, catch the sound of hitherto unsuspected " harmonics far and faint."

So much for the novelty of association of the " new " poetry. Once we understand how this poetry is new in its prosody, in its statements, in its allusiveness, and in the associations which it seeks to cause us to effect, we

should have no more difficulty in enjoying it than we have in enjoying poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge, Browning and Tennyson. Let us address ourselves to any poem of the "new" poetry in an appropriate state of docility, ready to let our feelings be aroused at the same time as our rational and analytic faculties are soothed and lulled into quiescence, and we shall find that any obstacles to our enjoyment have—most of them at any rate—quietly vanished.

In order to indicate what is new in the "new" poetry, I have drawn entirely on poems by T. S. Eliot. He is, as I have said, the most important of the "new" poets writing in English. If we are to enjoy the "new" poetry generally, we must first learn to enjoy, and as far as possible to appreciate, his poems. But while Eliot is the most important English poet of our time, he is by no means the only "new" poet. Among others I may name Charles Williams, W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Charles Madge, and Louis MacNeice. Rather than that I should say anything about them, it will be better, I think, if I hand to you a list of volumes of the "new" poetry and of books about the "new" poetry. I myself have now said what I can about it, and it now remains for you to go on, if you wish, to study it on your own.

That is indeed true of all the literature to which I have referred in the course of these lectures. I began in our first lecture, you may remember, by saying that to read for profit is so to read as to affect to advantage both our character and our conduct, and that in order to read with this result we need first of all to possess ourselves of the spirit of literature and to feel the literature of the past as a still living force. I then went on to lay down five rough and ready rules.

"First, that we should go, for this purpose, not to histories of literature, not to anthologies, nor to biographies of writers, nor to expositions of psychological theories concerning writers, but to actual pieces of writing. For literature, I said, consists of actual pieces of writing, and

it is only in actual pieces of writing that literature exists.

Secondly, that we should address ourselves to actual pieces of writing in an appropriate spirit of humility, with an appropriate receptiveness, in simplicity of heart.

Thirdly, that we should read nothing that bores us; for to acquire an ability to read for profit needs patience and effort, and hence the acquisition needs to be pleasurable.

Fourthly, that we should organize our reading; which means, on the one hand, that we should read some recognized masterpieces, and, on the other hand, that we should read, not a heedless variety of books, but with a certain connectedness.

Fifthly and lastly, that we should aim at learning as soon as possible to distinguish what is not literature from the real thing, to distinguish bad writing from good, and not only to recognize for ourselves good writing whenever we come across it, but also writing that is better.

That was the substance of the first lecture. And then, in subsequent lectures, we went on to consider good and bad novels, good and bad biographies, and diaries, autobiographies, collections of letters; we went on to consider scientific writing for the general reader, history, political writing, folk lore, religious writing. One lecture was devoted to prose style, and I was then anxious to impress upon you, you may recollect, that the style or manner of writing is not to be evaluated in isolation from the matter. Next, we passed to the question how plays may be literature, and from plays in prose we turned to poetic drama, the peculiar character of which I sought to make clear. This led us to go on to examine briefly the main varieties of the poetry that is not also drama. Finally, this evening, we have reviewed the novelties of the "new" poetry.

At each lecture I provided a reading list. There is one for this lecture too. Those reading lists, taken together, offer a wide field in which an acquaintance with literature may be sought, and they are no more than a guide. What is an acquaintance with literature?

It is, let me repeat in conclusion, simply a consciousness and an understanding of our enjoyment of certain good pieces of writing. It involves, that is to say, the formation of judgement and taste. To form our judgement and taste, to seek to be conscious and to seek to understand our enjoyment of whatever we read that is literature—there lies the road to reading for profit.

A READING LIST FOR THE STUDY OF THE "NEW" POETRY

(1) POEMS BY T. S. ELIOT:

Collected Poems, 1909–1935
Murder in the Cathedral } Plays } All published by
The Family Reunion } Plays } Faber & Faber
Four Quartets
Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.

(2) BOOKS ABOUT THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT:

Thomas McGreevy, *T. S. Eliot* (1931).
H. R. Williamson, *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (1932).
F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (1935).[1]

(3) BOOKS ABOUT THE "NEW" POETRY:

Harold Monro, *Some Contemporary Poets* (1920).
I. A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (2nd edition, 1926).
Glenn Hughes, *Imagism and the Imagists* (1931).
The English Association, *The Modern Muse* (1934).
Herbert Read, *Form in Modern Poetry* (1932).
M. Gilkes, *A Key to Modern Poetry* (1937).

(4) OTHER "NEW" POETRY:

W. H. Auden, *The Orators* (1934).
W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (1938).
W. H. Auden, *New Year Letter* (1941).
Charles Madge, *Poems.*
Cecil Day Lewis, *Poems.*
Charles Williams, *Poems* in several vols., notably *Taliessin Through Logres.*
Louis MacNeice, *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus: A Translation.*
Phyllis M. Jones, ed., *Modern Verse* (World's Classics: Oxford University Press).

[1] Recommended.

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